



CROOK TOLD TO HAND OVER £24K

Report by Nick Humphreys

A DRUG lord who had £230,000 worth of stolen cars and goods hidden in a lock-up has been ordered to pay back £24,000.

Ross Richards, of Heathlands, Stourbridge, is serving a 10-year total sentence for conspiring to supply Class A drugs and possession of stolen goods.

The 41-year-old was discovered to be hiding the goods at the lock-up in Wharf Road, Stourbridge, in April 2012. A proceeds of crime hearing at Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that he also used the unit to cover up a drugs racket.

Richards, who owns 29 properties, is worth £4 million. He and his co-conspirators from Birmingham, Stephen Hunt, of Edgell Road, West Heath; Eamon Henry, of Marston Road, Weoley Castle; and Laura Simmons, of Sir Hiltons Road, West Heath; were all found guilty of conspiring to supply cocaine in 2014 after a three-month trial. Richards was also found guilty of possession of stolen goods.

Richards told police that he was asked to look after the stolen goods for people who were 'higher up the chain'.

Profited

After the items were returned to their respective owners, it was agreed that the amount that Richards profited by was £24,331.

He was sentenced in January 2014 for his crimes, but proceeds of crime was delayed until the completion of a related trial.

On April 24, 2012, police had attended the unit and discovered a large amount of stolen property. There were vehicles – one of which had been stolen the day before. In total, the vehicles totalled £68,000 and altogether the goods discovered were worth in the region of £230,000.

He gave evidence at his trial in which he told of his extensive property portfolio and how he bought properties and rented them out.

He was known as 'The Money' to other members of the racket. His defence at trial was that he was a successful businessman and he didn't need to involve himself in drug dealing.

A financial investigator found that he had 29 properties but money still owing from several of them.

Judge Michael Challinor said: "Given that he's worth around £4m I don't think he should have a problem paying."

Richards was sentenced to a further six months in prison.

BOROUGH IS GETTING LIT UP FOR CHRISTMAS



Home town hero Paralympian Jordanne Wiley turns on the Christmas lights at the Cornbow Shopping Centre, Halesowen

CHRISTMAS is officially under way in the borough after Black Country Paralympic tennis ace Jordanne Wiley switched on the festive lights in Halesowen – with more festive spectacles planned for Stourbridge, Brierley Hill and Dudley.

The wheelchair tennis champ said she was thrilled to carry out the honour in her hometown for the first time. "This is special for me because I love Christmas and I love being home," she told the crowd, before flicking the switch to the sounds of Slade's Merry Christmas Everybody.

Fairground rides, a craft and food market, Santa and entertainment from Black Country Radio put families in a holiday mood. Milling with the crowd were circus performers and a nine foot Christmas Party Robot.

After her final tournament of 2016, Team GB's Jordanne, 24, is spending six weeks at home and plans to cook Christmas dinner.

Stourbridge and Brierley Hill get lit up next Saturday, December 3. There will be festive family fun in Stourbridge town centre from 10am until 5pm including funfair rides on Market Street and live entertainment in

Crown Square and Fountain Square. Father Christmas will be in his grotto in the Ryemarket from 11am to 4pm, and there will be stalls on High Street and Coventry Street. Coronation Street star Jack P Shepherd will switch on the lights at 5pm in Crown Square.

Brierley Hill will be celebrating from 11am with a Teenage Market in the Moor Centre and the lights switched on at 6pm followed by carol singing at the Civic Hall.

Singer Connie Talbot joins Father Christmas for Dudley's switch-on on Stone Street Square at 4.30pm on December 10.

RETAIL

Revamped store creating 80 jobs

A NEW-LOOK JD Sports store will be opening at Merry Hill shopping centre creating about 80 jobs.

The 17,000 square feet store will open on December 9 following a major expansion and refurbishment.

Councillor Rachel Harris, who represents the Brierley Hill ward, said: "Replacing jobs lost from BHS is clearly really good news for the area. We need jobs coming into the centre for people of all ages. It's just great news."

DJs will also be present as the store gets an up-tempo opening.

DEATH

Cigarette to blame for causing fatal fire

A CIGARETTE started the fire in which an elderly woman died.

Edith Williams was pronounced dead at the scene after the fire in her living room on Catesby Drive, in Kingswinford, on November 14.

A spokesman for West Midlands Fire Service said: "The cause of the fire was a cigarette. The circumstances surrounding her death are still being investigated."

Emergency services were called to the property just before 11.30pm.

ENVIRONMENT

MP wants rubbish mountain removed

DUDLEY North MP Ian Austin is calling for action to get a gigantic rubbish mountain in Dudley removed and says he will be raising the issue in Parliament.

The huge pile of rubbish, estimated to be between 2,000 and 3,000 tonnes, has piled up at a site operated by Rowan Oak Waste on Shaw Road, Dudley.

The Environment Agency has revoked the firm's permit, but the waste firm has failed to comply with notices and the massive mounds of rubbish have yet to be cleared away.

● Rubbish piles on misery for residents – see page 17

INSIDE

'WE NEED OUR LOLLIPOPS'



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Sand and gravel plan is dropped

CONTROVERSIAL plans to build a ‘quarry’ on a site earmarked for a 199-boat marina have been withdrawn by developers following a backlash by residents.

MJH Land & Water Limited, the firm behind the proposals, has announced they will no longer pursue proposals for the ‘extraction of sand and gravel’ at the 22-acre site.

Villagers in Swindon, near Kingswinford, feared the scheme would bring noisy vehicles and diesel fumes to the heart of their community and dozens attended a protest last month.

They have welcomed the decision. Campaigner Malcolm Rudge, who has lived in the village for

29 years, said: “The plans for the quarry were rejected almost universally because of the impact they would have had on transport and noise and air pollution.

“Also there were a number of issues concerning the number of lorries going in and out, and whether that was going to be feasible given the narrow roads.

“I am very glad and the fact the developers have listened to what was going on is important.”

Neil Warren, director at Land & Water Estates, said the decision to withdraw the planning application was made following a meeting with Swindon Parish Council.

The marina plans – which include a 130-space car park, farm shop, tea room and viewing area – are unaffected by the decision.

Mr Warren, said: “We were very keen to address any concerns about the work. We explained the proposal in detail and heard all concerns. Unfortunately, the application seemed to be misinterpreted by some members of the community who wrongly assumed the process was a quarry, which it clearly isn’t.

“However, due to the level of alarm this generated we decided to withdraw. This is a great shame as an opportunity to recycle more than 250,000 tonnes of materials has now been lost.”

‘Atrocious’ fees for bowls clubs challenged

DUDLEY Council plans to pass on maintenance costs to bowling green clubs in Stourbridge have been described as ‘atrocious’.

At its scrutiny committee meeting last week the council was challenged on its plans to pass on the leases to clubs which are part of The Ernest Stevens Trust.

Councillors heard each club was facing around £12,000 annually in maintenance fees as the cash-strapped council could not longer afford to subsidise these costs. Clubs currently pay £750 towards maintenance.

There are four greens under the trust – two at Mary Stevens Park in Stourbridge and two at Stevens Park in Wollescote.

Ken Rollason, a member of The Sons of Rest at Mary Stevens Park, warned the club would be forced to shut as a result of the costs, which were supposed to remain with the council as part of a long-running deed of gift.

He also revealed that quotes gathered by the club demonstrated grass cutting and other maintenance could be carried out for far less, with valuations ranging between £2,500 and £6,000.

He questioned the council’s claim that they needed to pass on the cost to save £48,000 a year.

Information

Mr Rollason, aged 68, of Cobden Street, Wollescote, said: “Once they had got that information, they said that they were going to look into it.”

Councillor Ian Kettle, who represents the Pedmore and Stourbridge East, suggested the council was not acting in the interests of the public, adding: “They have had this deed of gift for 87 years.”

Wordsley’s Councillor Matt Rogers expressed his sympathy with the clubs’ predicament. “It is absolutely atrocious when the council should be promoting healthy living and exercise,” he said.

Environmental services boss Councillor Hilary Bills said: “We are continuing to work closely with local bowling clubs to determine whether they could take over the leases of individual greens, allowing them to manage fee subscriptions themselves and procure competitively priced services.”

Walk into cone’s winter wonderland



At the cone exhibition, back from left, Bev Bernhard Bridges, Teresa Matten, Tania Holland and, front, Nadia Wood

A WINTER exhibition by the designers and craftspeople has opened at the Red House Glass Cone in Wordsley.

The popular attraction is hosting the Walking in a Winter Wonderland exhibition featuring work by ten of the site’s resident artists.

The display, which runs until December 23, is based around a wintery scene, complete with leaves, snowflakes and frosty branches.

Included are Teresa Mattens’s handcrafted jewellery and Tania

Holland’s mixed media collages and sculptures, featuring her trademark Wordplay Menagerie.

Beverley Bernhard Bridges’ hand-painted and dyed silk scarves and cards will be on display, alongside Nadia Wood’s Jam Jar Crafts and wedding service, featuring quirky handmade cards and up-cycled items.

The hot glass studio continues at the weekends, between 12.30pm and 3.30pm. The studios and coffee shop will be open.

Santa will also be paying a visit on December 10 and 11, and again from December 17 to 23, from 10am until 3.30pm. Entry costs £7.75 per child to include crafts and £5.40 for babes in arms who are too young for the crafts. Booking is essential by calling (01384) 812381 or 815571.

The popular Teenage Market returns to the cone on Saturday and Sunday as part of the venue’s Christmas Festival, with crafts and music from talented young people.

Banned fan was caught with smoke grenade

A BLACK Country football fan, who was banned from attending games for five years, has been hauled in front of the courts again after he was caught trying to attend a game with a smoke grenade.

Wolves fan Benjamin Richardson, aged 28, of Pebble Close, Stourbridge, was caught trying to attend a game between Stourbridge and Shrewsbury in July despite having a football banning order (FBO) against him in March.

He was spotted by West Midlands Police football unit officers and was arrested at the turnstiles for trying to breach his banning order.

A subsequent search found he had a smoke grenade with him.

Richardson denied the offences but was convicted after a trial at Dudley Magistrates Court. He was ordered to carry out 200 hours of community work and handed a court bill for £640.

PC Martin Portman, from the force’s football unit, said: “A ban is there for a reason and this should serve as a strong warning that anyone who tries to breach their FBO will be caught and face further punishment.

“The orders are not only given to people convicted of violence or disorder at matches but anyone who commits a football-related offence such as fighting or damaging property in a pub whilst watching a match.”

Richardson was given the FBO after being involved in 20 football-related disorders between 2008 and 2015, most of them at Wolves matches and also during an England match in Poland.

Advice offered to small businesses

BUSINESSES and social enterprises in the Dudley borough have the chance to win £1,000 worth of advice during the council’s Small Business Week.

It runs from Monday to Friday, and will include ‘innovation dens’ aimed at people with new ideas for products, looking to set up a new business, or considering expanding or changing direction.

Experienced business owners and consultants will have ideas pitched to them and the offer advice. One will receive further in-depth business advice. The dens are 10am to 1pm on Monday at Halesowen Library, Tuesday at Dudley Library, Wednesday at the Savoy Centre in Netherton, Thursday at Brierley Hill Library and December 2 at Stourbridge Library. Book via eventbrite.co.uk and search for Dudley events.

Support service is given police award

HEALTH and social care staff at Dudley Council won an award for supporting the vulnerable in the borough. Dudley Tele-care Service works with police to protect vulnerable and older people from harm. The project received a Working in Partnership Award from the police.

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Recycling plant has fallen foul of planners

COUNCILLORS will next week be asked if to launch enforcement action against a recycling firm.

Pegasus Grab Hire Limited has been running a recycling plant despite being told planning permission would not be granted at the site on Bott Lane, Lye, Stourbridge.

The company sought planning guidance about using the site for recycling inert materials to produce aggregate in March. But officers said it would be recommended for refusal as the site and surrounding areas had been identified as locations for housing as part of the Black Country Garden City.

There were also concerns the recycling centre would have an adverse visual impact on the River Stour Valley. A report to the council's development control committee states: "During July, a formal investigation was conducted at the site following a concern that an aggregate recycling activity was operating from the land."

"The investigation established such a facility had already been operational for a period of three months."

"Construction, demolition and excavation waste was being imported onto the site by heavy goods vehicles and associated crushing and screening machinery was being used to recover aggregates and other materials."

The company has installed a weighbridge, water dispenser system, office building, a caravan for night security staff and a car park at the site. The operator was warned in writing in August that the current use constituted a planning breach.

Vulnerable man robbed on bus

A VULNERABLE man was robbed of his phone on a bus in Brierley Hill.

The 35-year-old victim, who has Down's syndrome, was travelling on the 246 bus when he was approached by a man who asked him to hand over his mobile. The robber searched his pockets and bags before stealing his phone. Police have launched an appeal for information about the robbery on October 20 at 3.15pm.

Investigating officer Detective Constable Gareth Homer said: "This is a shocking crime whereby a vulnerable man has been specifically targeted. He was very frightened by the ordeal."

Contact DC Homer by email: g.homer@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk. Quote crime number 20DY/207581M/16, or call 101.

Ice rink at pub's festive weekend

A PUB car park is to be turned into an ice rink. The Fiddler's Arms, Lower Ecnah, hosts a festive weekend with fairground rides and other attractions on December 2 to 4. Tickets cost £7 adults and £5 under-12s.

Worker took clothes from pal's shop

A CLOTHES shop assistant who helped himself to £15,000 of stock from the store he was working at 'betrayed' his friend who was boss of the shop.

Roy Perry was working at Roger Scott Menswear in Stone Street, Dudley, after his friend gave him a job following the collapse of his own business and marriage.

But the 55-year-old from Oak Street, Dudley, took clothing which he stored in his mother's house, before moving it to a lock-up as the net tightened on his crimes.

Prosecutor David Iles told Wolverhampton Crown Court: "This defendant worked in a menswear shop in Dudley and had responsibility for looking after stock and putting money in and out of the till."

"It came to the notice of members of staff that his behaviour was somewhat odd."

"He was closely monitored and it was found that between February and November last year he had been helping himself to brand name clothing to the value of £15,000."

"When he was confronted about it, he broke down and took the owner to a lock-up not far from where he was living. Piles of clothing was discovered there in bags."

"Some of it had still not been used and could be returned to the store and sold. But around £5,000 worth had no resale value because he had worn them."

He added: "It was a shop that sold high-class

clothing. The manager knew the defendant, they were friends. He offered him a job when he fell on hard times. The defendant had been working there for two years."

The full impact of the defendant's theft isn't known but the owner lost his home and now lives in rented accommodation.

Perry pleaded guilty to theft and breach of trust. Miss Samantha Powis, defending, said Perry had been suffering from depression, adding: "As well as losing a parent and the breakdown of his marriage, he also lost his own business."

Perry was handed a nine-month jail term, suspended for two years, and must do 200 hours of unpaid work. He has to pay £5,000 compensation.

New group campaigns to save leisure centres

A CAMPAIGN has been launched by a former councillor to try to save three leisure centres from closing across Dudley borough

A threat hangs over Dudley Leisure Centre, on Wellington Road, Halesowen Leisure Centre, on Great Cornbow Road, and The Crystal Leisure Centre, on Bell Street, Stourbridge.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council would demolish all three centres due to the cost of repairing them. The three centres will close and two newly-built facilities will replace them in a bid to save the council £1.7m. The new centres would have swimming pools, sports courts and a gym.

Former councillor and cabinet member for environment and leisure, Tracy Wood, set up the The Save Our Leisure Centres campaign. So far 1,400 people have backed it.

Tracy said: "I have been going to the Crystal Leisure Centre gym in Stourbridge for 15 years, so I decided to start an open and positive campaign group to try to keep the centres open."

"With the help from my son, I set up the group and before I knew it we had over 1,400 join."

Pressure

"I'm going to continue building the campaign and putting pressure on the council to prevent the closures. The centres are good for the local economy and not everyone has a car to travel to leisure centres that are further away. There are good transport links to the locations where the leisure centres currently are."

The three centres would not close until the two new centres have been built but it will mean that one of the borough's three main towns will be without a leisure centre of its own.

The proposals form part of the council's aim to save £25m over the next three years due to cuts.

Tracy was holding a meeting with concerned leisure centre users in Stourbridge last week.

She added: "We're going to put forward some suggestions to Peter Lowe (council leader), listing ways to prevent the centres from shutting."

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, cabinet member for economic development and planning, said: "Our current centres are no longer fit for purpose and repairing them as they age is not a sensible or long-term strategy."

"Our communities deserve high quality, modern facilities. This proposal is part of a plan to offer sustainable, high quality leisure service provision for future generations."

The council will get a report on the plans on December 14.



Tracy Wood, front right, with fellow campaigners outside the Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge

Church rose window repair bill doubles

A CHURCH known as 'the cathedral of the Black Country' has been left with a hefty bill to restore one of its stained-glass windows.

An appeal for £33,000 was launched by parishioners at St Mark's Church in Pensnett after a large chunk of masonry fell from a window in 2014, prompting a safety scare.

Work got underway to restore

the stained-glass rose window in September, but it has now been discovered that it is in a worse state than first thought.

Marion Ovenall, a parishioner, said: "We had one quote and then with VAT and architect fees it has doubled."

"Once the scaffolding went up and the workmen got up there, they realised that all the glass and led was bowed and some of

it was cracked. It is looking at being around £53,000 now - it is just draining us."

"We are trying to do the best we can as we also need to keep money for the heating. We are urging the people of Pensnett to help us in any way they can."

Around £18,000 has been collected through fundraising and £10,000 from late church treasurer Robert Morgan.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Dickinson brings Real Deal to town

TV show Dickinson's Real Deal is coming to Halesowen College where host David Dickinson and the dealers will be on the hunt for antiques and other special items.

The show is currently one of the most popular daytime shows on ITV, watched by over a million people.

Free valuations will be available on Saturday from 9am to 5pm. For more information call 0117 970 7618 or email: dickinsonsrealdeal@rdftv.com or a form of photo ID and proof of address is required for those taking part in the show.

Backing for new homes scheme

PLANS up to 200 homes in Kingswinford have been recommended for approval for a second time.

The application had been deferred at Dudley Council's last development and control committee meeting because of concerns about building housing near a 200-year-old brickworks, which is still in operation. Members agreed on a site visit before making a decision at their meeting on Tuesday.

Kingswinford's Councillor Patrick Harley said: "We do need more local housing but we also need to be considerate of the existing businesses."

College is joint third out of 213

DUDLEY College is celebrating after being named joint third place in a league table of national Further Education Colleges.

Dudley College came joint third in the table published by FE Week, which scored all 213 colleges in the country.

Colleges were marked on the volume of apprenticeships, employer and learner satisfaction scores and whether their students become employed.

Keep dancing... and drinking your tea too

A NEW weekly tea dance has been launched in a Black Country town centre.

Dancers are getting together to skip the light fantastic at the Cornbow Hall, in Halesowen, every Thursday.

Sessions will run each week from 2pm to 4pm.

Admission is £3 per person and includes tea and coffee.

For further information about the tea dance and how to get involved call (01384) 812814.

St Peter's Yule fair

GET festive at a Christmas fair being held in aid of church funds in Dudley.

The fair will be taking place in St Peter's Church Hall, in Kent Street, Upper Gornal, on Saturday, offering the chance to buy Christmas treats.

Doors open at 10.30am and the festive event will continue until 2.30pm.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



TAKE a large pinch of salt with this week's news that dementia has become the biggest cause of deaths in the UK. It is only the biggest if you split all the cancer deaths into separate forms of cancer. If you total them up, as most people do when referring to the Big C, then cancer is still more likely to kill you than dementia.

MARK Woods took his sick old dog Walnut for one final walk on the beach at Newquay before taking him to the vet to be put down. Mark, whose 18-year-old whippet was paralysed after a series of strokes, says he was amazed that hundreds of people and their dogs responded to his Facebook message and took part in this last act. He should not be so surprised. The bond between man and dog goes back thousands of years and there is no partnership quite like it between any other species on this planet. It began with us feeding them and then helping with our hunting. It evolved into the deepest affection. I know an old man whose beloved labrador died four years ago. Every night as he goes upstairs to bed he still says "Good night, Charlie" to the dog he shared his life with.

AS police launch a crackdown on drivers using mobile phones, here's something to watch out for. Have you noticed how many white vans have driver-side windows which are much dirtier than the rest of the vehicle? How long do you have to leave the window unwashed before it gets so opaque that nobody can see you using your mobile?



SCIENTISTS in Switzerland warn that some red squirrels have leprosy and should not be touched. On the other hand, if you slip a leprosy squirrel half a denarius,

he might tell you his life story. But only if you're a Monty Python fan.

AS a keen observer of wildlife, let me tell you what would happen in a real-life version of the John Lewis Christmas TV advert which shows creatures happily bouncing on a trampoline. The foxes would eat the squirrels. The badgers would then chase the foxes off the trampoline and mark their territory by pooing all over it. The family's boxer dog, smelling the badger dung, would then mark the place by peeing on it. By daybreak the much-awaited Xmas present would look like a cross between an abattoir and a sewage works, and you wouldn't let your kids anywhere near it.

I MAY have discovered the perfect answer to people who ask why I voted for Brexit. I explain that I am very poorly educated and hate foreigners. It seems to work.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Trust launches new wildlife strategy

A STRATEGY to protect and encourage animals, insects and plants in the Black Country and Birmingham has been launched.

The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country chose Sandwell Valley Country Park, in West Bromwich, to unveil 'Our Vision for a Greener Future'.

The strategy, outlined by chairman Peter Shirley, covers from 2017 to

2022 and sets out the need to protect 131 threatened species in the area. These include the great crested newt, water voles, white-clawed crayfish, black redstart and native bluebell, as well as 22 threatened habitats.

A key part of the strategy will involve investing in developing trust staff and volunteers to improve skills and create the environmental leaders of the future.

A spokesman said: "The trust will continue to develop new and existing partnerships and provide support to inspire and engage communities, individuals, businesses and organisations to protect the natural environment.

"The trust will also work towards being financially sustainable and independent to reduce its reliance on grant funding.

"It will also seek a new base that will also be a home for wildlife where people can experience and connect with nature."

The trust will also work with other trusts in the region and nationally to protect spaces for wildlife and manage them to high standards.

One project will involve connecting wild spaces with wildlife corridors.

Fans disappointed at another FA Cup TV snub

By Matt Maher

OFFICIALS and supporters at Stourbridge Football Club have expressed dismay over the decision not to screen live on TV next month's FA Cup showdown with Northampton Town.

Non-league Glassboys are preparing for one of the biggest days in their 140-year history when the League One Cobblers visit the War Memorial Ground on Sunday, December 4, for a second-round tie.

But the mouth-watering clash will not be broadcast live with rights holders BT Sport and the BBC both choosing to overlook it – despite Stourbridge now being one of the lowest-ranked clubs left in the competition.

Ties at Macclesfield, Curzon Ashton and Lincoln City will instead be screened with the broadcasters having made their choices before Stourbridge defeated Whitehawk 3-0 in a first-round replay.

Financial

The decision carries financial implications, with the Black Country club missing out on a £68,000 broadcast fee they would have received had the match been screened live.

It will instead receive £12,500 with their match one of eight chosen as part of the BBC's Final Score programme on the Sunday afternoon of second round weekend.

Stourbridge chairman Andy Pountney said: "We're delighted to have got this far but I'm disappointed and a little surprised we weren't chosen as a live game.

"We are one of the lowest-ranked teams left and have a good record in the competition and the money received for a live game would've made a massive difference."

A capacity crowd of around 2,600 are anticipated for the Northampton game. Stourbridge, managed by Gary Hackett, has been among the most successful FA Cup teams in non-league football over the past decade.

Tim the guide dog helps health worker



Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust chief operating officer Paul Bytheway meets guide dog Tim with Sue Thomas

A HEALTH trust has welcomed a guide dog as its first ever canine recruit – much to the delight of staff and patients.

Tim the German shepherd helps eye clinic liaison officer Sue Thomas in her work at Russells Hall Hospital, in Dudley. Sue is registered blind and is based in the ophthalmology department.

Due to her sight loss she has found it hard to access other areas of the hospital, so Tim has been recruited to help. Previously Sue had used a sighted guide to help her to get round the hospital.

Sue said: "Now I have Tim on hand to help, I can be more independent in my work. I and can move around the busy hospital corridors with confidence.

"Tim has made a huge difference to my life, both on a professional and personal level. I hope that having Tim around will help to show others that life and work can continue after a diagnosis."

Paul Bytheway, chief operating officer at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, spent time with Tim during the dog's first few weeks at the hospital.

He has seen the positive impact that the guide dog has had on both the patients and visitors at the busy health facility.

Paul said: "The benefit of having Tim around the hospital will be invaluable for Sue.

"I'm really glad we've been able to support her in this way and to provide the dog."

MP raises pharmacy funding cut backs

A BLACK Country MP has urged the Government to stop proposed cuts to pharmacies as he fears it could lead to more winter deaths.

Dudley North's Ian Austin has hit out at Government plans to cut funding for community pharmacies by £170 million, a move which he says could force up to 3,000 local pharmacists close.

He said a package of emergency funding will benefit only one per cent of pharmacies across Dudley – compared to 40 per cent in areas such as Chesham and Hampshire.

The MP sent out a survey to thousands of Dudley residents and a massive 97 per cent replied that they opposed the funding cuts.

Commons

Mr Austin has taken the battle to Westminster, speaking in the House of Commons he said: "One way of preventing excess winter deaths would be to ensure that people can go to their local pharmacy for advice, essential medicines and flu vaccines.

"But plans to cut pharmacy budgets are going to hit Dudley hard."

He urged the minister to 'listen to people in Dudley and sort this out?'

Health Minister Philip Dunne, MP for Ludlow, said that NHS England and Public Health England had launched the Stay Well This Winter campaign, extended the free flu vaccine for children, as well as providing winter fuel payments and the warm home discount scheme.

Driver is hurt in plunge down bank

A MOTORIST suffered serious injuries after his car left the road and crashed down an embankment.

No other vehicles were involved in the accident, which happened on Wednesday night (November 16).

The incident happened on Hagley Wood Lane in Hagley, near Stourbridge.

A spokesperson from West Mercia Police said: "The 49-year-old man, believed to be the driver, was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham with serious injuries."

The car was left badly damaged, with the bonnet crumpled by the force of the impact as the car headed head-first down the embankment.

The man was in hospital being treated for his injuries.

Marlene entertains at Age Concern fair

BLACK Country comic Marlene will entertain visitors at a charity Christmas craft fair and coffee morning in Stourbridge.

The even is at Age Concern Stourbridge, in St John's Road on Friday, December 2. Admission is free.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Chance to meet Frozen star Elsa

CHILDREN will be able to meet Frozen star Elsa at her Merry Hill ice kingdom.

The princess will be at Toys R Us every Friday, Saturday and Sunday throughout December to pose for pictures and youngsters can make a wish at her well. Every child will also receive a gift.

There will also be a hamper raffle in aid of Birmingham Children's Hospital to be personally delivered by Elsa on Christmas Eve.

Elsa's grotto will be open from 11am to 3pm, costing £5.

Looking for Santa at the museum

CHILDREN can search for Santa Claus at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley.

With help from costumed guides, visitors can meet a series of festive characters, solve clues, sprinkle dust on reindeer shoes and even send letters up the chimney to Santa's workshop.

By the time Santa's hideout has been found, he will have a surprise gift waiting.

Tickets are selling fast, book by calling 0121 5208054 or go to www.bclm.co.uk for more details.

Five star hygiene rating for pub

A POPULAR pub in Brierley Hill has gained the top rating for its levels of hygiene in the council's Scores on the Doors programme.

The Abraham Darby, at Merry Hill shopping centre, was awarded the five star rating by inspectors from Dudley council.

The Scores on the Doors venture aims to highlight high quality hygiene standards in pubs, restaurants, take-aways and clubs across the borough.

School prepares with a lifesaving machine

A SCHOOL in Stourbridge has taken steps to prepare for medical emergencies by purchasing a defibrillator.

Ridgewood High School in Wollaston bought the heart equipment after learning about the benefits of the device from a member of their Parent Teacher Association.

The school purchased the potentially life-saving device from Physio Control. Lee Farley, a paramedic, visited the school in September to provide training and awareness to staff.

Mayor opens fair

THE Mayor of Dudley will be the special guest at a church Christmas fair.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif will open the event at St Mark's Church, Pensnett, on Saturday. The event including cake and gift stalls, and a tombola will be held from noon. Entrance 25p.

GivePenny platform helps hospice fundraising

A HOSPICE planning a £3 million major redevelopment has announced a key partner for its ambitious fundraising.

The Mary Stevens Hospice has teamed up with innovative online giving platform GivePenny.com for to assist the Stourbridge hospice's biggest fundraising campaign.

The Hagley Road hospice will be using GivePenny to process its fundraising campaign for the complete remodelling of the day services unit, being upgraded for the first time since opening in 1991.

GivePenny began working with charities earlier this year, offering an alternative online donation platform which gives fundraisers the opportunity to collect sponsorship against personal goals, milestones and other basis.

The online platform was founded by local entrepreneurs, Lee Clark, Richard Waldron and Ed Russell.

Dan Malin, digital media & PR specialist of Mary Stevens Hospice said: "It is important for us to ensure that we have a close relationship with a trusted partner to make the process as smooth as it possibly can be, and give us the best chance of reaching our goal of helping more and more families in the Dudley borough."

To support the campaign contact info@msfhfundraising.co.uk, donate directly at www.givepenny.com/msh-capital-appeal or start your own fundraising challenge at www.givepenny.com/appeal/capital-appeal

Deport parents call by Euro MP

UKIP Euro MP and Sedgley councillor Bill Etheridge says that parents who leave their children behind in EU countries should be deported.

The MEP has called for action to stop EU nationals from abandoning their children when working abroad. He said the issue is estimated to involve up to half a million children.

The EU Commission is set to undertake a study to assess the problem but Mr Etheridge said immediate action is required to protect youngsters. He said: "What we have here is tantamount to child cruelty. If people choose to have children then they have a responsibility to see that they are cared for until they grow up. We should be making the parents return to face their responsibilities."

Santa's sleigh on its way to Kinver

THE annual Christmas sleigh will be arriving in Kinver tomorrow (Friday), hosted by Kinver Rotary Club as part of the village's late-night festive shopping. The sleigh and carol singers will be in the village centre from 7pm.

Plans for Aldi store to create 40 jobs



An artist's impression of the new store

ALDI aims to create 40 jobs with the creation of a supermarket in King-swinford.

The proposals are for a new store on the site of a former Focus DIY and garden centre.

The site off Dudley Road, King-swinford, has stood derelict for three years.

The Aldi supermarket would cover 1,350 square metres, with the current car park increased from 94 spaces to 105.

It is expected to create around 40 jobs, both full-time and part-time.

Aldi submitted its application to Dudley Council this week. The budget chain states: "We feel the proposals represent a well thought out and sensitive response within the constraints of the site."

"The Aldi 'deep discount' retail store provides an amenity to the local area, which is currently lacking, along with the creation of local jobs both now and at a later date."

"Aldi looks forward to becoming a considerate neighbour and part of the local community."

The design and access statement

submitted says that vehicle access to the site will remain the same.

The existing central main shop entrance will be blocked off and a new lobby created to the far end of the building with a pedestrian path from Dudley Road relocated accordingly.

The prospect of a new shop proved popular at a consultation event held in St Mary's Church Centre, in King-swinford, in September.

Aldi has invested in several new stores in the region, including on the site of the former King Arthur pub, Birmingham New Road, in Dudley.

Protest over cuts to lollipop crossing patrols

CAMPAIGNERS fighting cuts to the school crossing warden service to save £395,000 a year have been served up a 'mishmash' of figures, it has been claimed.

Placard-wielding lollipop wardens demonstrated their anger outside Dudley Council House last week, ahead of a scrutiny committee meeting looking into the proposals to withdraw funding for the service.

During a heated debate it emerged that officers could not agree on the number of jobs and crossings affected.

After a warden told the meeting he earned just £10 a day, councillors complained that the sums did not add up.

Scrutiny chairman Councillor Alan Finch described officers' response to questions as 'poor' and requested a breakdown of the figures.

Extension

A consultation was launched last month and an extension granted when opponents argued they had not been given long enough to put their case.

A petition containing almost 9,000 signatures to save the wardens was handed to the council.

Last Tuesday's meeting heard there were 81 school sites, 63 wardens and a further 14 standby wardens involved in the service but it was pointed out the figures differed to those given to the last meeting.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare claimed the risks to children's safety would not be so great if the 20mph speed limit around schools was implemented during arrival and home times only, instead of a blanket restriction that drivers ignored.

Strategic director Alan Lunt said that with equipment and training factored in, the £395,000 costs could be accounted for. He agreed to bring a breakdown of the figures to the next meeting in January.

But Councillor Matt Rogers said afterwards: "We are not dealing with numbers here but people who give their lives in all weathers to make sure children get to school safely and they are at risk of losing their jobs. The officers should have been better prepared."

The council is not obliged to pay for school crossing wardens but mother-of-two Emma Swain, whose children attend Thorns Primary School, said it had a moral duty. She added: "A child will be killed if this goes ahead and the council must take the responsibility for that."

As part of the consultation, schools were asked



David Bowater, from Sedgley, with school crossing patrol protesters outside Dudley Council House

to rate options. These included ending the school crossing patrol completely, retaining a crossing patrol operated and managed by the council at an estimated rechargeable cost of £6,500, and retaining a crossing patrol site with staff who are directly employed and funded by schools. The estimated fee for that latter proposal would be £1,500 payable to the council.

Only 26 of the 123 schools invited to take part in the consultation responded. Of those that did, 76.9 per cent put ending the provision completely as their last choice, with 53.8 per cent putting retaining it with the charge to the council as their first.

The council has blamed budget cuts imposed upon them by a reduction in Government funding. In a plea to councillors at the meeting, resident

Geoff Collins said: "It is an indication of the world we live in that we're looking at Dudley Council potentially saving money when they could be saving children."

Councillor Hilary Bills, cabinet member for environmental services, last week defended the authority's move, insisting the decision to review the service had not been taken lightly. She said: "Ultimately I would remind people that it is a parent's or guardian's responsibility to ensure children arrive at school safely. The council does not have a statutory duty to provide the service. We will always take the safety of children very seriously."

Councillor Finch said the committee and public had been given a 'mishmash' of information.

A final decision is due on March 6.

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with Mark Andrews



Now spend on helping pub bomb families

THE Iraqi Historic Allegations team was set up at a cost of £57 million to investigate claims that British troops had abused Iraqi prisoners. It is thought that virtually all of the cases it has been called to investigate will be thrown out during the next few months.

The Al-Sweady inquiry, which cost £25 million, was set up to investigate allegations of torture and murder by British troops in Iraq. After five years it found the torture and murder allegations were "wholly without foundation and entirely the product of deliberate lies, reckless speculation and ingrained hostility".

Meanwhile, the families of those killed in the Birmingham pub bombings, 42 years ago this week, have been granted only partial legal aid in their fight to establish how their loved ones died. And more than four decades on, it seems we are no nearer to seeing their killers brought to justice.

This week, Birmingham Council granted the 21 victims the freedom of the city. It is a nice gesture, but they will never be able to enjoy the freedom that those who planted the bombs are still presumably enjoying to this day.

Isn't it rather sad that we seem to be much hotter at investigating those who seek to protect our country than we are towards those who seek to destroy it.

□ □ □

A BOOKIE last week pointed out that a £5 accumulator on Leicester City winning the Premier League, Britain voting for Brexit and Donald Trump becoming US President would have netted a hypothetical punter a cool £15 million.

I wonder how much you would get if you then went on to bet on a general election next year, Jeremy Corbyn becoming prime minister, and Wolves and Aston Villa both getting promoted? OK, sometimes you need to quit while you're ahead.

☐ ☐ ☐

HERE we go again. According to those renowned social commentators at Bisto, Wolverhampton is the least friendly city in the country. The subsidiary of the Premier Foods conglomerate says that just 32 per cent of Wulfrunians have a neighbour they could call for help if they lost their key, and just 16 per cent engage in social activities in their neighbourhood. With a sample size of just 4,000 across the UK, and small margins of difference between the supposedly friendliest and least friendly cities, it seems hard to justify such sweeping generalisations.

And then we get to the crux of the matter. Only 10 per cent invited a neighbour to their home for a meal in the past year.

Really? But I bet when they did they made them real gravy.



Animal lover Angela with Skinny settled nicely in a hammock



Angela with a tiger cub



Follow the leader – Angela Potter with a baby wallaby

Safari, so good after four decades at park

For Angela, the head of wildlife operations, it is more than just a job, it is a way of life, as SUE SMITH finds out

A YOUNG woman who took on a temporary summer job at West Midland Safari Park now holds one of the top roles at the attraction nearly 40 years later.

Ensuring the animals are ready to face the challenges of the harsh winter months is the job of Angela Potter, the head of wildlife operations and she will be joining the Talking Point team for our sister daily the Express & Star.

Angela has actually lived on the park site for 25 years and can be the first to be called out if there are any problems.

Dedicated

She arrived for a six-week summer job in the Pets Corner area in 1979 and decided to stay and not return to agricultural college.

Since then she has been a keeper in the reserves and gone up the ranks to become head keeper, responsible for the hoof stock, and about two years ago took over as head of wildlife operations from Bob Lawrence, who recently retired.

Angela's whole life is dedicated to animals and at home she keeps goats, a cockatoo, dogs and hens. She said: "I joined the park in Pets Corner and never left and I suppose I felt that I had found my forte."

"Every day is different and all the time I have been here there has never been a day when I did not want to go to work. I still get excited about the animals and their antics.

"It's more than a job, it's a way of life," she added.

"During my time at the park I have hand-reared many animals and kept wallabies in



Up close and personal – Angela and Wally, a wallaby joey at the safari park

pouches which I carried around with me.

"But my favourites are the giraffes because I have worked very closely with them.

"I also believe that the animals definitely

know the keepers and their green uniforms. We are definitely regarded as part of their

we are definitely regarded as part of their families."

"Although I left agricultural college to stay

on at the park I do believe it is important to study and gain a scientific background to get to the top."

She has taken her own advice and gone on to study for an Open University science degree, a Zoo Animal Management course and a degree in zoo resource management.

Angela's 19-year-old daughter, Shannon,

seems to be following the same route and works in the cashier's office at the park while currently studying for an Open University course.

Angela said: "At the moment we are expecting to be busy with the Santa Safari and I am looking forward to keeping readers up-to-date with what is happening at the park."

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Christmas is no longer fun for shop staff

AS Christmas is getting nearer the adverts for the big stores are appearing on TV. Many of them are promoting a family Christmas with mum and dad happily entertaining guests, all full of Christmas Joy.

How lovely it would be if these stores practised what they preached and gave the staff working for them the chance to do just this.

After 20-plus years working in retail I can tell you that with up to midnight opening, no holidays to be taken during December, days so busy you hardly have time to breathe let alone take a

break, when Christmas Day finally arrives, all you really want to do is sit down and do nothing.

Then after they have taken every bit of your time and energy in the run up to Christmas, yes, Boxing Day you will back again.

Then comes New Year's Eve, and again the shop staff have to make a choice, either go for it and suffer the next day, trying to work half asleep or suffering the effects of a glass too many.

Or you can be a party pooper and cut short your celebrations to be bright

and cheerful for all those sad people who have nothing better to do than wander round shops on New Year's Day, usually grumpy and hungover.

Only emergency services should have to work or be on standby on Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

The opening of shops is completely unnecessary and I would hazard a bet that the boys at the top, who decide all these opening hours, are not at work – they will be enjoying what the shop staff long for.

JENNY JAMES
Wordsley

Needs of the many ignored

THE two main political parties have left the people of this country down with major blunders.

First, the stopping of national service in 1960. The rumour at the time was sons of MPs complained that the two years' service interrupted their university education. So it was stopped.

The many were let down by the selfish few, as usual.

Second, the banning of hanging. It was said in Parliament it was barbaric. That's a matter of opinion.

Today, because of this, many people are subjected to barbaric behaviour.

The rule of law does not exist because there is no backbone in Parliament.

People who have a right to live out their lives in safety.

MPs are voted in by the people, for the people, not their own self interests.

The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

B. LAWLEY
Bilston

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

dudley.chron@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and **MUST** include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Goose, not dog, poop is the main problem

IT was with total amazement that I read your headline: 'Parks dog ban is here to stay'.

As a regular dog walker at Himley Hall I can assure you that during the summer at no time was there more than a couple of people using the dog ban area. There were a great many families with children around the pool area walking through piles of goose droppings.

It is obvious that children will want to be near the water and to feed the ducks. The only time the dog ban area was busy was when it was used as a car park for different events.

It is very easy to come up with favourable statistics when only one side of the argument is consulted. I know of no dog walkers that were asked their opinion. We use the park all year round, not just a couple of days during the summer, and have to walk our dogs through areas covered in goose droppings.

Khurshid Ahmed has been asked on a number of occasions to come to the park but has never responded. It would be very interesting to know how they obtained these figures and some evidence of it.

D. WHITE
Russells Hall

Thanks to everyone at service

ONCE again my sincere thanks to all who attended our Remembrance Day Parade and Service of Remembrance at the Brierley Hill cenotaph and church.

To all the wreath layers and representatives from the local services, the police, fire and ambulance, our local councillors and of course our Guiding and Scouting groups and our local citizens and the many parents.

Many thanks also to our local vicar and the excellent trumpeter – well done both.

A special mention if I may to the young girl who made such a good job of lighting the candles representing the Military and Civilian Services involved in the conflicts (could there be a helper's badge for her uniform perhaps?).

Once again, my sincere thanks to all involved.
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Home working to improve after report raised concerns

INSPECTORS walked into a Netherton residential care home without being asked who they were, a report has revealed.

A lack of such safety measures along with concerns over the storage of medicine and outdated criminal checks, saw the Care Quality Commission (CQC) rate Nethercrest Residential Home in Netherton as 'requiring improvement'.

The premises on Brewster Street, part of Astonbrook Care Homes, provides accommodation and personal care to up to 43 older people, specialising in those with dementia. The CQC report states: "When we arrived at the home, we were let into the building by a member of staff who did not speak with us or check who we were. The staff member opened the door and allowed us to walk into the home freely."

"This meant that the appropriate action had not been taken to ensure that people were kept safe from the risk of unauthorised people having access to their home. As the staff member had not stayed with us upon entering the home, they had also not ensured that the door was secured."

Watch out, the witches are about

A THEATRE group is staging a play version of a Roald Dahl classic scary tale for children, The Witches, in Netherton.

Dudley Little Theatre, which will be celebrating its 70th birthday next year, is performing The Witches from December 8 to December 11 at Netherton Arts Centre.

The Witches tells the story of a young boy and his grandmother in a world where child-hating evil witches secretly exist.

Dudley Little Theatre's Chris Ridgeway said: "We chose the play because of it being the Roald Dahl centenary year and, of course, a very popular book."

Evening performances take place on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7.30pm, plus Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2.30pm.

Tickets are £8, concessions £7, see website www.dudleylittletheatre.org or call Chris on 07582 318017.

Fridge

Although the inspectors were pleased to see that staff had been required to provide criminal record checks, there was no system in place to ensure these were updated. It was also highlighted that at the time of the inspection, on September 28 and 29, it had been identified for three weeks that the fridge used to store medicines had been too warm. No action had been taken in that time.

While concluding that the home required improvements, in terms of safety, effectiveness, care and leadership, the report did note positive aspects, including the standard of food.

Nick Farmer, Nethercrest operations director, said: "Since the CQC inspection the staff, working with our new manager and me at Nethercrest, have worked hard to do more than just match the CQC requirements on improvements."

Nothing Wishee Washee about this Aladdin



Kinver Light Operatic Society members will perform Aladdin at the villages's high school from December 3 to 10

WOLVERHAMPTON Grand Theatre is on the road to Old Peking this year with Joe McElderry in the title role of this year's pantomime, Aladdin.

But he has a rival – young Olivia Ashley Smith, who is also playing the lad with the lamp in Kinver Light Operatic Society's version.

From December 3 to 10, the group will present festive favourite Aladdin at The Kinver High School, Envile Road, with performances at 7.30pm nightly and three matinee performances over the weekends too.

Olivia is joined by Claire Jackson as Wishee Washee and Phoebe Stait as

Princess Jasmine. Watch out for a formidable Widow Twankey and a host of colourful chorus members too for this panto treat.

For tickets, priced from £10 to £13, visit www.kinverlightoperatic.sharepoint.com or email s.houlston@icloud.com

Join 400 on Santa run beside canal

HUNDREDS of people are expected to dress up as Father Christmas to take part in the ninth annual Santa Fun Run.

The event, which supports KEMP Hospice, will take place on December 4. Early registration is being urged for the sponsored run, which attracts support from individuals, businesses, pub regulars and community groups.

The two kilometre run starts at Brinton Park in Kidderminster and will travel along the canal to Wolverley before returning through the town and back to the park. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult runner.

Supporters are also being encouraged to welcome back runners as they cross the finishing line next month.

This year's event is being sponsored by Western Power Distribution, which has supplied the volunteer team money to buy 400 Santa suits and promotional items.

Shelley Stanley, event fundraiser at KEMP, said: "Last year we raised a fantastic £16,000. This year we are encouraging clubs, businesses and pubs to enter teams to help us raise even more."

Registration costs £15 per person to include a free Santa suit, hot drink and snack at the end of the run.

To register visit www.kempshospice.org.uk, email shelley.stanley@kempshospice.org.uk or call 01562 756066.

MP impressed during visit to dementia café

BRIERLEY Hill's Nine Locks Dementia Café had a special guest when Mike Wood, MP for Dudley South, visited the café to hear about the lives of people with dementia.

Mr Wood said: "It seems particularly important that we do everything to help people living with the condition."

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View from above at Merry Hill centre



The drone view of Merry Hill from UAV Filming, as the centre gears up for a busy festive season with longer opening

THIS fantastic photograph offers a whole new perspective on the Merry Hill shopping centre and its surrounding area.

The shots were captured by a drone sent up high above Dudley and Brierley Hill by Christopher Homer from UAV Filming.

The scale of the vast shopping complex is clear with rows upon rows of cars parked up outside.

Mr Homer also filmed the neighbouring Waterfront in Brierley Hill.

The amazing aerial photographs are the latest stunning drone shots taken across the Dudley borough.

Meanwhile, Merry Hill bosses into have announced that opening hours are being extended for Christmas shopping from tomorrow (Friday) as the malls will open until 10pm on weekdays.

The shopping centre will also open until 8pm on Saturdays for shoppers.

Grotto

The shopping centre has also joined forces with toy manufacturer Playmobil to create a unique Christmas grotto experience.

Merry Hill will be offering children the chance to meet some larger than

life Playmobil figures alongside Santa himself, finally leaving with a Playmobil gift.

Rob Pickersgill, marketing manager at intu Merry Hill, said: "Thanks to intu's nationwide scale and consumer facing brand, we've been able to team up with one of the world's best known toy manufacturers to make our Christmas grotto a must-visit destinations for families in the West Midlands over the festive season.

"We can't wait for children to see what we have in store."

For more information visit intu.co.uk/MerryHill

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Shocking film of bus joyride shown in court

STARTLING footage shows a 12-mile police pursuit of a stolen bus, which was driven through red lights in the Black Country and on the wrong side of the road.

With joyrider John Burton, who had been disqualified from driving, at the wheel the bus can be seen mounting the pavement and going the wrong way around an island on the footage, which has been released by West Midlands Police.

The bus, with two Black Country men as passengers, careered through a red light, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard earlier this month. It was driven at up to 50mph.

It went the wrong way round a traffic island, knocked down a sign, clipped the kerb and lost bodywork in a collision with a fence, suffering £10,000 damage – but still did not stop. Burton was even undeterred

when two tyres of the single decker were burst by a stinger laid across the road by police in a bid to stop it.

The vehicle continued on the wheel rims – and even overtook a car – while listing alarmingly and leaving a trail of sparks along Penn Road in Wolverhampton.

The Sandwell Travel bus, stolen hours before the chase from the company base in Tipton on March 30, finally came to a standstill in The Paddock, Bilston, where the driver and two passengers, Simon Loveland, 39, of Dale Close, Tipton, and Thomas Tibbs, 21, of Clinic Drive, Stourbridge, made a run for it but were quickly caught.

Judge James Burbidge QC jailed 38-year-old Burton, of Beaconsfield, Brookside, Telford, for 16 months and Loveland for a year. Tibbs was given a six-month term.



The bus, with two burst tyres, mounts the kerb as the dangerous joyride comes to an end

Raising a glass to rescued ale festival

THE Deputy Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Dave Tyler, will officially open the 31st Dudley Winter Ales Fair.

This year's event runs from tonight (Thursday) to Saturday in Dudley Town Hall.

It will feature more than 80 real ales this year as well as a selection of foreign beers, cider and wine.

Organisers from the Dudley and South Staffordshire branch of the Campaign for Real Ale chose a phoenix rising from the ashes as the logo for the event after the event was initially called off.

It was saved after Jacqui Edwards came forward as festival organiser and branch members rallied round to take on other roles at the event.

The festival opens at 5.30pm on the Thursday and runs from 12 noon to 11pm on the Friday and Saturday.

Holden's Brewery in Woodseton is sponsoring the beer festival which will include a range of stronger brews, session and mid-strength beers, together with new brews from local and national breweries and micro breweries.

For more details go to www.dudleycamra.org.uk

Number of jobless falls 22,000 to 10-year-low

UNEMPLOYMENT in the West Midlands dropped by 22,000 in the three months to September as nationally the numbers out of work fell to a 10-year-low of 1.6 million.

The region's total was down to 151,000 following an increase in recent months and the number of people in work has risen by 72,000 over the quarter, to 2.7 million.

Nationally numbers out of work fell by 37,000 with the unemployment rate falling to 4.8 per cent with employment remaining at a record rate of 74.5 per cent with 31.8 million now in work. Wages grew by 2.3 per cent and there are more than 750,000 vacancies at any one time.

Claimant count figures for the West Midlands however were up 240 last month to 83,555 – 2.3 per cent of the working population.

In Sandwell the numbers claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and other unemployment benefits rose 100 to 7,225 (3.6 per cent) with Walsall up 45 to 4,950 (2.9 per cent).

Dudley

The claimants total in Wolverhampton was flat at 6,735 (4.2 per cent) and in Dudley it was down 30 at 5,645 (2.9 per cent).

Cannock Chase saw a fall of 25 to 725 (1.2 per cent), Lichfield was down 15 at 440 (0.7 per cent) with South Staffordshire flat at 720 (1.1 per cent) and Stafford up by five to 670 (0.8 per cent).

Wyre Forest, including Kidderminster, was up by five to 745 (1.3 per cent).

By John Corser

Employment Minister Damian Hinds said: "Yet again we have a strong set of figures, with employment continuing to run at a record high and unemployment falling to a 11-year low. Growth is being fuelled by full-time professional jobs while wages are continuing to perform strongly, which underlines the resilience of the UK labour market. It's good news in the West Midlands where there's a record 2.73 million people in work, a rise of over 100,000 in the last year alone.

"The measures we have taken have put our economy in a position of strength, and we will work to ensure more people can benefit from these opportunities as we build a country that works for everyone."

JobCentre Plus Black Country spokeswoman Sue Blewitt said that some of the improvement in figures for the area was down to seasonal temporary jobs.

"The Royal Mail is recruiting 200 in Wolverhampton alone and Argos and other big retailers are recruiting for Christmas."

Not guilty is plea on manslaughter charge

A MAN from South Yorkshire has denied killing 33-year-old Karl Swift who was found with serious injuries in a Black Country street.

Dean Hartley, aged 30, of Burnaby Crescent, Sheffield, pleaded not guilty to manslaughter and attempting to pervert the course of justice by making a false statement to police about the death of Mr Swift.

Mr Swift, also from South Yorkshire, died after being discovered in New Road, Halesowen, on September 8.

The defendant was remanded in custody after appearing by video link at Wolverhampton Crown Court last week and is due to stand trial at that court on April 18.

Hartley's father Dean Hartley, aged 51, from Chaucer Road, Sheffield, and Lee Ardron, 29, of Broad Inge Crescent, Sheffield, have also been charged with attempting to pervert the course of justice and are bailed to appear in court at a later date.

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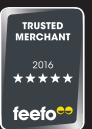
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Reunion bid to track down Royal nurses



This photo was taken by Alison on the day the group had their interviews in March 1990

NURSES who trained at Wolverhampton's Royal Hospital 30 years ago are being sought as part of a reunion. The nurses started their training in January 1987, with some nurses already tracked down from as far afield as Australia and New Zealand.

Alison Darby, aged 48, of Finchfield, was one of the nurses who trained at that time and has been working to get in touch with her former friends and colleagues. She went from being a nurse at both the Royal and at New Cross, to training in Midwifery before becoming a school

nurse. Alison said: "The reason that I decided to hold the reunion was that I was thinking about it for our 25 year anniversary, but now we've got up to 30 I think we definitely should do something."

Those people who are still being sought are: Sue Henworth, Diane Webb, Alison Jones, Anita Saini, Teresa Lyon, Andrew Wells, Lucy Wade and Sara Newman.

The reunion is at Patshull Park Hotel, near Pattingham on January 6 at 7.30pm. Anyone with any information can contact Alison Darby at A-Darby@Outlook.com

Gearing up to spread cheer

NATIONAL Express is getting in gear to launch its first-ever Christmas charity coach tour.

The UK's largest coach operator is calling on people in Wolverhampton to reveal which local causes they would like to see supported.

The 'National Expressmas' coach will donate thousands of pounds to local causes - and they are calling on local folk to recommend which local causes close to their hearts, they

would like to benefit from a Christmas bonus of up to £1,000. Chosen charities will then be paid a special visit by the National Expressmas coach, which will see gifts hand-delivered.

The coach company is particularly keen to hear from people who are able to share stories about how local causes have impacted their lives - or those of their loved ones.

Any registered charity with a local base can be nominated.

To nominate, go to nationalexpressmas.com and National Express is

also giving people who nominate the chance to reveal what they themselves would like for Christmas, for a chance to win a festive treat.

The special National Expressmas coach - one of the company's brand new double deckers - will then take to the nation's roads in the first week of December, delivering festive cheer across the UK.

Managing Director Tom Stables said: "Christmas is a time for giving, and to say thank you, we want to give back to local causes - and people."

Make sure these needy families don't go hungry

FOR most of us Christmas is a time for giving, eating, and spending time with friends and family.

But there are families in the Black Country and Staffordshire struggling to put a meal on the table every day which can make the festive season seem an even bleaker time of year.

This is why our sister daily the Express & Star has launched the Feed a Family This Christmas Appeal which will provide vital supplies to families in need.

Donations of festive food, such as mince pies, chocolates and Christmas puddings as well as basics such as canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, pasta and rice are needed. Also non-food items such as toiletries, new socks and small gifts.

Causes

The good causes being supported are The Well (Home of the Wolverhampton Food Bank), the Good Shepherd Ministry, based in Wolverhampton, the Black Country Food Bank, which has centres across Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall, Smethwick Food Bank, Walsall North Food Bank and Cannock and District Food Bank.

The appeal will also be supporting The Haven which provides both support services to women and children who are affected by domestic violence and homelessness.

The campaign has already been backed by Wolves legend Steve Bull and Wolves favourite Mel Eves. Support has also come from Bilston Operatic Company, which staged Our House at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre recently. Donations of food have already started flooding in including support from Lichfield Food Bank which has handed over some of its surplus stock and the 8th Wolverhampton Scout group has given us an array of items leftover from its annual summer camp - hot dogs, spaghetti, cereals, milk and jam. The group has also pledged to hold a separate collection at its group premises over the coming weeks in the hope of



At a drop-off point, from left, Wolverhampton Food Bank Project managers Gary and Caroline Price, Neil Maddox, Midcounties Co-operative Codsall store, and editor Keith Harrison, at the Express & Star

donating more items. Businesses are also doing their bit by hosting donation boxes on their premises for workers to drop-off contributions. Inspired Gaming Group in Showell Road, Wolverhampton and Guardian Locks & Engineering in Willenhall are both helping.

*For the full list of items which can be donated visit www.expressandstar.com The drop-off points are at: Express & Star Wolverhampton head office, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1ES; Express & Star Cannock/Walsall office, Queen Square, Cannock, WS11 1EA; Express & Star Stourbridge office, 3 Market Street, Stourbridge, DY8 1AB; Waitrose Wolverhampton, Penn Road, Wolverhampton, WV2 4NJ; The Co-operative Food, 28-32 Wood Lane/Bakers Way, Codsall, WV8 1DB; The Co-operative Food in High Holborn, Sedgley, DY3 1SS.



With donations are Recce Hancher, Alex Neilson and Taylor Fereday from 8th Wolverhampton Scouts

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Women's pension fears raised by MP

DUDLEY North MP Ian Austin has demanded extra support from the Government for Black Country women hit by pension changes.

Mr Austin was speaking in Parliamentary debate on changes to the state pension age for women born in the 1950s.

Government plans will accelerate rises to the state pension age for women, so that it will reach 66 by 2020, instead of 2026 as originally planned.

Mr Austin has been working alongside the group Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) to help get their voices heard.

Speaking in the debate, he said: "Women in the Black Country have done their bit, and that is why the Government should be coming up with proper transitional arrangements so that they can plan properly for their retirement now."



Members of British Military Fitness Stourbridge are pictured during their fun in aid of the Poppy Appeal

Fitness fanatics run up cash for the Royal British Legion

A MILITARY fitness club marked Remembrance Day with a fundraising run to three local war memorials, laying crosses and wreaths at each of the sites.

The venture by the fitness group based at Stevens Park in Wollescote raised more than £1,000 for the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal.

Members of British Military Fitness Stourbridge decided to collect money for the Royal British Legion by taking part in a run totalling more than 10k. For all that distance they also carried a stretcher with weight loaded equivalent to a typical human being.

They started at 9.30am at Stevens Park, then ran to Quarry Bank war memorial. After paying their respects, the team carried on to Brierley Hill war memorial, before finishing at Stourbridge memorial.

Donations

Collecting donations in buckets along the way, as well as via a Just-giving page, the runners have managed to smash their £500 target and have so far gathered an impressive total in excess of £1,000.

To donate search BMF Stourbridge Remembrance Stretcher Trek on the justgiving.com website.

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Dog ban at Himley grounds is challenged

A DOG owner has hit out at a decision to permanently ban pets from using certain sections of a popular park.

Dudley Council, which runs the park, has confirmed that following its trial of a dog free zone in Himley Park, which started in February, it had decided to keep the ban in place.

The authority said it made the move after 78 per cent of people the council surveyed supported the dog free area.

The survey, however, has been challenged by dog owner Cath Molineux, who said: "I don't believe it and I would question its robustness. I'd be interested to hear how they selected the people they spoke to for the survey, and how many of them were dog owners."

Mrs Molineux, who lives in Coseley, says she enjoys walking her white German shepherd Rosie at the park.

Fraternity

"There is a nice dog-walking fraternity down there," she said. "But they haven't spoken to any of us about what we think."

The 54-year-old expressed her surprise that the ban was ever introduced, having not heard of issues between dog owners and other members of the public prior to its introduction.

"There were already areas where people didn't walk their dogs anyway," she said.

"I think they have just had this idea and now they don't want to backtrack on it."

Dudley Council said the ban was introduced to provide families with an area free from dogs, where they

By Judith Hawkins

could enjoy walking, playing games and picnics.

The zone, which amounts to around a fifth of the park, stretches from the main entrance to the West Gate, running alongside Himley Road.

The council says it has been speaking to the park's visitors throughout the year to gauge opinion on the trial scheme.

They say that of 251 people surveyed, 78 per cent said they were in favour of the dog free area, with 62 per cent in support of keeping the dog ban in place all year round.

The council said these findings and previous requests from the public led them to the decision to keep the ban in force.

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, cabinet member for planning and economic development, said: "It is important we listen to people who use the park and gauge their opinion. The survey results have made it quite clear that a majority of people are in favour of the scheme."

Assistance dogs on leads are still allowed in the dog free zone.

Famous stationery brand to disappear

OFFICE stationery brand Staples is to disappear from the UK after its American owner sold the struggling business.

The UK arm of Staples – which employs around 1,100 staff across 106 stores in Britain – has been bought by restructuring specialist Hilco for a 'nominal sum'.

Hilco said it would phase out the Staples brand in the UK over the coming months.

Staples currently has a branch of the Keyway Retail Park in Willenhall, at Tildesley Street in West Bromwich and another in Kidderminster.

A shop at Merry Hill was shut in 2013 as part of two dozen Staples store closures.

Plans for the store estate and the impact on staff are not yet known.

Hilco is understood to be carrying out an in-depth review of the business over the next few months as it also comes up with a new brand name.

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Advice to growers of hellebores

Clent Gardening Club

THE October meeting welcomed Samantha Hopes from Stourbridge to give a talk on hellebores grown at Ashwoods Nurseries.

Samantha Nigel gave an illuminating talk on the propagation and development of new varieties of hellebores and illustrated her talk with a wide variety of excellent and colourful photographs.

She offered advice on the cultivation and care of these plants and suggested the best locations in the garden to grow these successfully. Samantha reminded members that the hellebore tour at Ashwoods was well worth undertaking in the early months of the year and the club made this trip a while ago. After Samantha's talk a return visit is very much on the cards.

After a number of questions from the audience, the chairman thanked Samantha Nigel for her illuminating and entertaining talk before asking her to draw the raffle and reminding members that the November meeting comprised the annual members' supper with entertainment provided by Elspeth Sullivan a local musical entertainer.

All are welcome at club meetings which are held at Clent Village Hall on the fourth Friday each month.

Further information for anyone interested in either joining or just visiting is available by visiting <https://clentgardeningclub.wordpress.com> or by contacting chairman Martin Grange on either 01562 883009 or 07917 184762.

Lively question time follows visit by MP



Mike Wood MP, Luncheon Club member Kath Turner and Councillor Patrick Harley

CHAIRMAN Mary Jones welcomed 25 members and three visitors to the November lunch at The Lodge, Wellington Road, Dudley to enjoy an excellent meal of roast beef. It was particularly pleasing to welcome back the MP for Dudley South Mike Wood and Councillor Patrick Harley.

Mr Wood had previously worked in the European Parliament for seven years. He said 2016 had been a challenge keeping up with a very busy schedule. In the Dudley South Division a new constituency office had been opened in Wordsley. Also he was trying to set up an Enterprise Zone at the Waterfront with Government funding as well as negotiating for the metro extension

Dudley South Ladies Luncheon Club

to reach Brierley Hill and Stourbridge. A lively question time followed.

The Christmas lunch will be on Friday December 9, noon for 12.30pm to include the Halesowen Hand Bell Ringers. New Year meetings begin on January 13 with speaker Ian Bott telling of Black Country stories about the War.

Visitors can attend three times before deciding to join. For more information ring the secretary on 01902 372984 or email the chairman: maryjones30@sky.com

Elvis at Harte of discussion

Kingswinford Ladies Social Circle

and her husband on their diamond wedding.

Sheila announced the membership fee would stay the same but the monthly fee would be £1 due to the increasing cost of speakers.

Any blankets for Addis Ababa should be taken to

the Christmas party on December 1 as this will be the last collection.

The speaker gave an extremely interesting and articulate talk about Elvis Presley. Christabel Groves gave the vote of thanks and two ladies won raffle prizes.

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Rubbish piles on misery for residents near mess



The mound of rubbish at Rowan Oak Waste Services Ltd that has become a major eyesore in Shaw Road, Dudley

ANOTHER mountain of waste is blighting Dudley – just a few miles away from the site of a rubbish heap which stood for years.

The Environment Agency is taking enforcement action against the company responsible for the heaps of rubbish – estimated at up to 3,000 tonnes – at a site on Shaw Road, Dudley. Rowan Oak Waste Services Ltd has been stripped of its right to operate.

Jonathan Hall, of the Environment Agency, said: "Rowan Oak Waste,

Shaw Road, previously held a permit allowing them to receive waste at the site. Earlier in the year we took action with the operator over the volume of waste they were storing. Our aim was to get the operator back into compliance and within their permit conditions as soon as possible.

"As soon as we knew this was not going to be successful we took enforcement action against the company."

It comes less than three weeks after the last rubbish was finally removed from the former RDF site in Brierley Hill, at a cost of £2 million to the landowner.



Wall of rubbish at the problem site

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Christmas Festival

BRIERLEY HILL

Saturday 3 December
11am to 2pm • St Michael's Church Christmas Tree Festival

1 to 4pm • Craft Fair with Santa's grotto at Brierley Hill Civic Hall

6pm • Carol concert at Brierley Hill Civic Hall

11am to 4pm • Teenage Market at Moor Street Centre

12 noon onwards • Stage entertainment including

Brierley Hill Musical Theatre and Bromley Primary School at Moor Street Centre

5pm • Lights switch on and carol singing around the tree

Sheep trail around town shops and children's rides

Sunday 4 December at 6pm • Tree of lights service at Brierley Hill Methodist Church

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Christmas Festival

BRIERLEY HILL

Christmas Light Switch On Brierley Hill on December 3, 2016

Christmas lights switch-on event with plenty to do from 11am to 5pm continuing with a carol concert at Brierley Hill Civic Hall starting at 6pm.

Moor Street Centre will have a Teenage Market, where young people are hosting stalls selling a wide range of goods, a programme of entertainers will be on stage throughout the day, including performances by Bromley Primary School and Brierley Hill Musical Theatre. Children's rides will also be at the centre.

From 11am to 2pm St Michael's Church is hosting their Christmas Tree Festival and everyone is welcome to take a look around.

Throughout the town there will be a trail in local businesses of handmade

woollen sheep from the nativity story which children can follow and hopefully see them all.

At the other end of town a craft fair will be at Brierley Hill Civic Hall from 1pm until 4pm and Father Christmas will make a special visit to his grotto.

From 4.30pm onwards people will be gathering around the Christmas Tree in front of the Civic Hall to sing traditional Christmas carols, led by Brierley Hill Musical Theatre on the run up to the lights switch-on at 5pm.

The following day, on Sunday December 4, Brierley Hill Methodist Church will be having a Tree of Lights service starting at 6pm where everyone is welcome.

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New era for Hippodrome as campaigners take over venue

CAMPAIGNERS are days away from taking over Dudley Hippodrome – bringing the reopening of the venue a step closer.

Members of the Black Country Hippodrome group have revealed a lease has been agreed with Dudley Council and will be signed off this week.

That means the group will take the reins of the venue from council bosses and can set in motion plans to get the historic theatre and concert venue back up and running.

The campaigners who want to re-

vitalise the dilapidated building, and rebrand it Black Country Hippodrome, were hoping to have the keys months ago. Negotiations over the lease dragged on due to various complications.

A crunch meeting between council bosses and campaigners saw the final details thrashed out. Both sides have now agreed a five-year lease, says Hippodrome board member Steve Daniels.

That means the keys to the venue should be in the hands of the Hippodrome group this week and the first steps can be taken to get the venue open as a theatre for the first time in decades.

Architects will come up with plans for the revamp of the iconic Castle Hill building, while fundraising plans to pay for the work will be put in place.

Mr Daniels explained: "There was a four-hour meeting and we shook hands afterwards on it and now we're really rocking and rolling."

"We thrashed out all the things we needed to and it's all sorted. Our next job is to interview architects and pick who we want to take the project forward."

The venue is in need of a complete overhaul having been closed for seven years after last being used as a bingo hall. It has not been a theatre since the 1960s. Before then it had hosted such stars as Laurel and Hardy, Gracie Fields, George Formby and Ken Dodd.

The group has said it needs around £5 million to restore the Hippodrome to its former glory. One plan is to allow people and companies to sponsor seats.

The building was two weeks away from being bulldozed to make way for a public open space when campaigners stepped in earlier this year.

Art on show at The Portal

BRIERLEY Hill's Nine Locks Art Group is showing artworks at Dudley Canal Trust's Portal building, off Birmingham New Road.

Tutor Tim Nash leads the artists who meet each Monday at Brierley Hill Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Holly Wain, heritage activities assistant at Dudley Canal Trust, said: "We're so excited for Nine Locks Art Group to be exhibiting at the Portal. This is a great opportunity to support local artists and perhaps encourage visitors to get involved in joining an art group."

The exhibition is free to visit and it will run until January 5.

All of the original artwork in the exhibition will be for sale. Details via 0121 557 6265 or at www.dudleycanaltrust.org.uk website.

Zoo's orangutans star in calendar



Jazz and Sprout pictured by Lancashire photographer Hollie Gordon in the calendar

FOUR orangutans at Dudley Zoo are doing their bit for charity by appearing in a 2017 fundraising calendar.

The four Bornean apes from the zoo will feature in a calendar in aid of the Orangutan Foundation.

The charity works to conserve threatened orangutans and their habitat in the tropical forests of Borneo and Sumatra.

The photos of the Dudley four, Jazz, Sprout, Benji and Jorong, were taken by 23-year-old amateur photographer Hollie Gordon, from Blackpool. She said: "I decided to do the calendar because I love orangutans and wanted to do something to try and raise money for a charity who support them."

Characters

"Dudley Zoo's four orangutans are such characters that they are more than worthy to be ambassadors for their species."

The A4-sized calendars are priced at £10 plus £2 postage.

Rachel Hickman, media and communications officer at Dudley Zoo, said: "We were delighted to hear Hollie was including Dudley Zoo's four charismatic orangutans in her calendar. We're keen to support the fantastic work of the Orangutan Foundation and earlier this year we sent £500 to the charity from on-site fundraising efforts for World Orangutan Day."

The calendars can be purchased through Hollie Gordon Photography on Facebook or via holliegordonphotography@outlook.com

Online debut for true crime satire show

A COMEDY writer originally from Stourbridge has created a satirical 'true crime' documentary that will feature on the BBC iPlayer.

Céin McGillicuddy has written and directed it alongside his comedy partner, Andy Kinnear.

'Sexy Murder' is a spoof of hit reality crime documentary series, such as Netflix's Making a Murderer and landmark HBO documentary series, The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst.

The 30-minute stand-alone episode is due to be released on BBC iPlayer on December 13 and was produced by independent company, Roughcut TV.

This is the second time the duo have collaborated with Roughcut TV following their cult BBC cop-show comedy, Top Coppers, in 2015, which they also co-wrote, edited and directed.

Sexy Murder follows American documentary filmmaker, Christoph Spinetti, played by Rich Fulcher, best known for his role as Bob Fossil in The Mighty Boosh, on his quest to prove a man innocent.

Mr McGillicuddy said: "We love the true crime documentary genre. It's ridiculously entertaining but that's what we found so fascinating."

Now based in London, the pair met as students at Bournemouth University's Media School.

Retro traders are to turn back the clocks

A TRADING centre will be celebrating its first anniversary with a 60s-themed weekend in aid of charity.

The Emporium in Brierley Hill will host more than 30 traders selling vintage and retro furniture and collectables to raise funds for Multiple Sclerosis. The event takes place at the Dudley Road site on December 3 and 4. Tickets cost £5 on the door.

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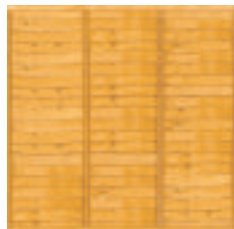


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New venue for Mary Stevens Hospice Tree of Light ceremony

Commercial feature

The Mary Stevens Hospice have been forced to move their annual Oldswinford Tree of Light ceremony to the Great Hall at Oldswinford Hospital School.

The service normally takes place at St Mary's Church in Oldswinford. Due to issues with the boiler which can't be fixed before the service on Saturday, the Hospice have been forced to make alternative arrangements.

The service will now take place at the later time of 4:30pm, to allow for anyone who arrives at the church to have time to make their way over to the new venue.

David Knight, Chaplain/Spiritual Care co-ordinator at Mary Stevens Hospice Group, said: "It's a great shame as we have always held the service in the church and it always provides a stunning and poignant backdrop to a very moving ceremony, and they are fantastic supporters of the Hospice."

"Our thoughts are with them because it is an awful time to be experiencing problems with the boiler and we hope they're able to fix it. However, we are incredibly grateful to Oldswinford Hospital for stepping in and helping us in our hour of need, as this service is incredibly important to us and our local community, who join us every year to support each other and remember those they love."

To find out more about the Hospice's three 2016 Tree of Light services, visit www.facebook.com/



Oldswinford Tree of Light represents loving memories

marystevenshospice/events where you will find information for each individual service. Or call (01384) 377 778 to speak to a member of the team.

Meanwhile, The Mary Stevens Hospice has become partners with an innovative online giving platform, GivePenny.com as part of the ambitious fundraising drive for a £3 million redevelopment.

The Hospice will be using GivePenny to process their largest fundraising campaign, which will see the Day Services Unit completely remodelled and upgraded for the first time since opening in 1991.

The Hospice were one of the first charities to sign up to the new platform, founded by local entrepreneurs, Lee Clark, Richard Waldron and Ed Russell.

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JESSICA DAVID

Coronation Street star to switch on town's festive lights

Commercial feature

Stourbridge is set to sparkle with festive fun in the town centre from 10am until 5pm on Saturday, December 3, and a guest appearance by Coronation Street star Jack P Shepherd, who plays David Platt in the top TV show.

There will be funfair rides on Market Street and live entertainment on stages in Crown Square and Fountain Square.

Chicago's will be keeping the town's Christmas shoppers entertained with a fantastic line up of local bands on their outdoor stage.

The town is hosting its biggest ever Christmas craft market on High Street and Coventry Street with traders selling everything from festive decorations to delicious sweets, savoury treats and stocking fillers.

Grotto

Father Christmas has also found time in his busy diary to stop by and join the festivities. He will be in his grotto in the Ryemarket from 11am to 4pm, updating his present list ready for Christmas Eve.

Other attractions will include street entertainers and a Lego workshop.

The town's spectacular Christmas lights will be officially switched on by special guest Jack P Shepherd, courtesy of Chicago's, in Crown Square at 5pm to round off a day packed with festive fun.



Above, special guest Jack P Shepherd; Below, last year's festive street scene





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Ho Ho Go — sign up and suit up for the Santa Jog



Suits you Santas – the masked ranks of Father Christmas runners who were in action for Mary Stevens Hospice

The ever-popular Mary Stevens Hospice Santa Jog returns this year and record numbers of participants expected to take over Mary Stevens Park in their trademark Santa suits.

The run sees friends, families and even pets get dressed up as Father

Commercial feature

Christmas to run or walk 5km around Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge, to raise money for the Hagley Road hospice. Last year's event attracted more than 600 entrants.

As ever, the run will start in Mary Stevens Park, DY8 2AA. It will take place from 10.30am on Sunday,

December 11. Entry includes your free Santa suit and costs just £13.50 for adults, £7 for under-10s and £2.50 for dogs.

To enter call the Hospice fundraising team on (01384) 377 778 or visit www.facebook.com/marystevenshospice or visit their website, www.marystevenshospice.co.uk for details on how to register online.

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Evening to remember comedian Tommy

A SPECIAL club night is to remember the Black Country's beloved comedian Tommy Mundon tonight (Thursday). The Shenstone Club in Halesowen is putting on a Tommy Mundon Remembered Evening in honour of the comedy legend who was born in the town. The event which is raising funds for

the Mary Stevens Hospice, will start at the Kent Road venue from 7.30pm and will see a line-up of entertainment. In 2014 the popular comedian passed away at the hospice following a battle against Parkinson's disease. Earlier this year, a biography written by his long-time friend Angela

Daniels was launched to celebrate his life, in association with the Black Country Society and Morgan Solicitors. Proceeds from the book are also going to the Mary Stevens Hospice. Tickets to the club night cost £5 and must be booked in advance by calling 0121 422 5157.

Raise a glass to toast the Great War heroes

SIX War heroes from the Black Country will be commemorated as part of a project 100 years on from the Battle of the Somme.

History groups nominated three First World War heroes from each of Sandwell's six towns to be put to a public vote.

Half a dozen were chosen and the six chosen heroes will be remembered on specially-designed beer mats to be distributed to pubs across the borough.

The poll was organised by Sandwell Council's libraries and archive service as part of the local commemorations of the Battle of the Somme.

Sacrifices

Councillor Richard Marshall, cabinet member for leisure, said: "This has been a very worthwhile exercise to mark the dark days of the First World War and those bloody events at the Battle of the Somme."

"It is an imaginative way of reminding us all of the great sacrifices made by people from the six towns of Sandwell."

"The beer mats will start to be distributed in local pubs in the coming weeks so I would urge people who see them to raise their glass to Sandwell's heroes."

The six people selected were Private Albert Barnsley, of Oldbury, Lance



Private Albert Barnsley

Corporal Sidney Taylor, of Rowley Regis, Private Harry Bodfish, of Smethwick, Nurse Tilly Tate, of Tipton, Stoker Frank Malton, of Wednesbury and Private Arnold Slater of West Bromwich.

The heroes with the most votes in each town were: Oldbury – Private Albert Barnsley with 54.72 per cent; Rowley Regis – Lance Corporal Sidney Taylor with 38.57 per cent of the vote; Smethwick – Private Harry Bodfish with 47.17 per cent; Tipton – Nurse Tilly Tate with 67.53 per cent;



World war nurse Tilly Tate

Wednesbury – Stoker Frank Malton with 48.15 per cent of the vote and West Bromwich – Private Arnold Slater with 36.37 per cent of the vote.

Sandwell's Community History and Archive Service wants any residents with any photographs of the heroes to call 0121 558 2561 or email archives_service@sandwell.gov.uk

Organisers of the project thanked people who voted for their local heroes and history groups for their support.

For a short profile of the six heroes visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/localheroes

Football legend boyhood family home up for sale

THE childhood home of football great Duncan Edwards has gone up for sale.

The terraced house in Elm Road, on Dudley's Priory estate, has been put on the market with the price tag of £120,000 – enough for one of today's top footballers to snap up with a week's pay packet.

The property has three bedrooms and a stylish, modern kitchen. There is wooden decking in the garden.

It was while living at number 31 Elm Road that Edwards honed his skills on the nearby Priory Park playing fields, which would eventually propel him to stardom as part of the famous 1950s Manchester United 'Busby Babes' team.

He was born in 1936 and spent his early years in Dudley before his football skills saw him become a key player for United and England until his life was tragically cut short.

He died of his injuries following the Munich Air Disaster in 1958, aged just 21.

Plaque

Former teammate and World Cup winner Sir Bobby Charlton unveiled a blue plaque in Duncan's honour at the park just last month, to mark what would have been his 80th birthday.

It was the latest tribute to the Dudley hero, adding to the statue in the town centre and stained-glass window at St Francis' Church.

A major trunk road leading to the town was also named in his honour.

Lisa Flavell, who owns the house, admitted she didn't realise quite how important one of its previous tenants was when she first moved in.

The 34-year-old said: "The last owners did mention it but not being a football fan, I didn't really know much about him."



His boyhood home – 31 Elm Road



Duncan Edwards – Busby Babe



The stylish modern kitchen at the property, on sale for £120,000

"But it got me interested and made me want to find out more about him and his life."

She added: "On anniversaries I have had a few people knock on the door asking if they can take a picture of the house. It just goes to show how important he was."

Miss Flavell has lived at the property for nine years and has been joined

in that time by partner Paul Enoch and their one-year-old twins Charlie and Betsy.

The couple have decided to move to a new family home.

Wolves fan Mr Enoch was amazed to discover the house's link to such a prestigious footballer. "He knew all about Duncan Edwards. He thought it was brilliant," Miss Flavell said.

Do you have a long-term health condition or are you 65 or over?

Make sure you get your prescription medicines before Christmas Eve.

Because many GPs and pharmacies will close over the holidays.

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Sanjay Ganvir
Pharmacist

Try auction house for seasonal decorations

ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips



YES, here we are again, already in the thrall of the forthcoming festive season – so I thought this week we'd take a look at what you could possibly snap up at auction to add to those seasonal decorations!

We always tend to stick to the standard tree with its baubles and tinsel – but why not think about using

lovely displays of winter foliage, berries, holly, ivy and firethorn in some vintage vases and jugs?



Display your scented potpourri, fir-cones and nuts in Victorian dishes and bowls, use little china plates on which to put gold-papered chocolate coins and wrapped sweets.

Utilise cups and saucers as tea-light holders, and look out for reasonably-priced candle-holders – not only for the Christmas dinner table but elsewhere in the house, the traditional 'Wee Willy Winky' single candle holder with handle looks good anywhere.

Also look out for vintage plant holders, these would be great for poinsettia, tiny Christmas trees and decorated displays of twisted willow.

Think about adding traditional, warm colours such as red, green and gold and look out for any items that will do this – little 1950s Pyrex soup dishes are perfect, for example, and vintage wine glasses look great on display.

Again, look out for those pretty vintage bowls in which to display fruit and small table crackers, and if you're feeling particularly adventurous see if you can find a sleigh or toboggan on which to display presents . . . if we get a white Christmas it will serve a dual purpose!



And don't forget your festive dining table.

We're already selling pretty runners decorated with holly and mistletoe (replicas of originals) and china sets edged with gold.

It doesn't have to cost a fortune, or even necessarily match, but old china looks so good on a dining table and will have many other uses throughout the

year, both practically and on display around the home.

Look for assorted vintage plates with decoration in seasonal colours and meat chargers, jugs and gravy boats and Royal Crown Derby fruit bowls and candlesticks (Royal Crown Derby is popular at present).

Small Coalport sugar bowls are great for sweets, chocolates and nuts, and if you find an old soup tureen do buy it – you can still get beautiful Georgian ones, it doesn't matter if the lid is missing.

You can pick up very attractive George Jones bowls, again perfect for fruit, and a brightly decorated Majolica plate would make a nice table centrepiece, complete with tea lights.

Old china baskets are lovely containers for bread rolls, and you might even buy a vintage tea service in which to serve Earl Grey on Christmas afternoon!

Perry and Phillips Auctioneers in Low Town, Bridgnorth, holds sales of antiques and collectables on the first Tuesday of each month. Valuation days, for sale items only, are held every Wednesday at the Mill Street saleroom, from 10am until 4pm.

The next sale takes place on Tuesday, December 6, viewing is during the weekend and on the Monday prior to the sale.

Magical time for little children and 'big kids'



What's your festive theme?

THIS week I have seen the first sparkling Christmas trees in windows. Charming twinkling lights over a month before the magical day. My seasonal decorations do not grace our house until after my husband's birthday in mid December, much to the disappointment of our son when he was younger. Every year I dress the tree in the same decorations passed down to me from my parents and aunt, beautiful delicate glass baubles in every colour that shimmer and glint. The rest of the family finding it a massive chore to hang the hundred plus baubles and more than their life is worth to drop and break one!

Today's style is a single colour with sparse large baubles, neatly tied bows and glinting icicles and there is a star topper placed easily on the top. As a child I remember precariously reaching to tie on a tiny fairy with string and wrapping tinsel around the circumference, round and round and round.

LED and fibre optic embellishment of trees and trimmings has given a contemporary look to the overall modern Christmas and our gardens glitter with pretty lights, our houses with festive ambience and perfume. There

STYLE FOCUS

with Janet Timmis



is so much delight in the faces of children as Christmas creeps into their environment.

This year I notice the brightly coloured nutcracker soldiers, tiny to tall, everywhere, a flip back to the toy soldiers from the past. There are hooks specifically to hang the elaborate stockings on the fireplace, garlands to dress the staircase, vintage wreaths on the door, chair covers, table decorations and even loo roll.

Originally trees were decorated with fruit and nuts and then in the 18th century candles were attached to the branches to add illumination until electrification gave us the lighting of today.

Vikings and Saxons worshipped trees and it is believed this is where our Christmas customs came from originally. Prince Albert, beloved husband of Queen Victoria, is credited

with having introduced the Christmas tree to England in 1840 but it is believed it was brought here much, much earlier.

Every store gives over a huge area to Christmas and gives us all an excuse to spend our hard-earned money, there are fantastic selections in Tesco, Asda, Dunelm, The Range, Homebase, Matalan and many more including delightful high street independents. The likes of Hobbycraft allow us to craft our way through the season and give us ideas to create a fairytale on a budget, that is how our ancestors made Christmas so magical.

You may not be an expert when it comes to wrapping the gifts you have bought but the luxury stores will do it for you and alternatively you can buy beautiful bags and boxes, ribbons and bows and the newest trend is 'furoshiki', the Japanese art of wrapping gifts in cloth. Ultimately anything goes, as long as it is enchanting and fascinating, Christmas is for little children and 'big kids' and so much can be achieved with a little imagination.

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Tests indicated that those who have an older biological age can restore a younger pattern of glycans, simply by overhauling their lifestyle

New test reveals your true, inner body age



Your biological age may be very different

THINK you know how old you are? Yes, OK, you might know the date on your birth certificate, and the number of candles on your birthday cake – but while these show your chronological age, your biological age – how time, genes and lifestyle have taken a toll on your body – could be very different.

But now, a new test can tell you what the difference is between your chronological and biological ages – and suggest what you can do if you're much older on the inside than you should be.

WHAT IS THE GLYCANAGE TEST?
After testing more than 40,000 people worldwide, an international research team has developed the GlycanAge test to assess the levels of tiny sugar molecules – glycans – in the blood.

Glycans attach to proteins in the immune system, and form distinctive patterns on the protein molecules. These patterns change with age, and as certain patterns

By Lisa Salmon

are typical at certain ages, identifying how much an individual person's patterns differ from the norm for their age indicates whether they're ageing at a faster or slower rate than normal.

Tim Spector, a professor of genetic epidemiology at King's College London, who's part of the GlycanAge team, says: "We have been studying ageing in twins for 20 years and studying many different markers and predictors of age and biological age."

"This is the best I have come across to date, although we do not understand the mechanisms yet."

WHY AM I AGEING BEYOND MY YEARS?
Your genes and lifestyle can affect the glycan patterns in your body and, not surprisingly, the lifestyle factors linked to glycan ageing include smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, poor diet, raised cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and chronic stress.

Another glycan-ageing factor is the drop in oestrogen levels after menopause, as oestrogen protects against ageing.

This means that while men tend to age steadily from their 30s, women often age 50 per cent faster for five years after the menopause.

However, the good news for those who have an older biological age is that tests indicate that you can restore a younger pattern of glycans, simply by overhauling your lifestyle.

WHAT IS YOUR TRUE AGE?
People who want to take the test can do so via one of the health practitioners on the GlycanAge.com website.

The GlycanAge team is still trying to improve its test, and is collaborating with Kings College London on a project to be conducted between 2017 and 2018.

They want to recruit 1,000 people who are undergoing a positive dietary, physical and/or psychological lifestyle change, and follow their progress for three to six months.

Participants who stick to their planned lifestyle change will be offered the GlycanAge test at a non-profit price.

For more information about the test or to register to take part in the project, visit glycanage.com

fast the ticket

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Return of The
Nutcracker
- Page 29



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Katie Melua



Thursday (Dec 1), 7pm Symphony Hall, The songstress is joined by the 23-strong Gori Women's Choir as she explores her Georgian musical roots, as heard on the In Winter album, and sings a selection from previous albums.

Turin Brakes



Wednesday 7pm Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton The former Mercury Prize nominees from London released their seventh album Lost Property at the start of this year and have won a loyal following over 15 years.

Michael Ball & Alfie Boe



Monday and Tuesday 7.30pm Symphony Hall, Birmingham Following the success of their Together album, the musical theatre star and radio host from Bromsgrove teams up with Britain's favourite tenor for two consecutive nights in Brum.

Dirty Dancing



Various times Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton A new production of the romantic movie drama set at a 1960s US resort where dance passions run high. Lewis Griffiths as Johnny and debutant Katie Hartland as Baby (pictured).

Dahl's marvellous medicine is real cure for the blues

He passed away more than 25 years ago, but Roald Dahl remains Britain's favourite children's writer.

His books have sold an astonishing 250 million copies worldwide and The Times placed him 16th on their list of Great British Writers since 1945.

Among his most popular works were James and the Giant Peach, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, The Witches, Fantastic Mr Fox, The BFG, The Twits and George's Marvellous Medicine – all books that mean so much to children everywhere with their ability to shock, frighten and delight in equal measure.

And George's Marvellous Medicine has been brought to the stage at Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre, running until Saturday, by the Birmingham Stage Company.

Temper

It has been adapted by David Wood and features Dahl's amazing story about a young boy who makes a marvellous new medicine to cure his grandmother of her terrifying temper.

But when his grandmother drinks his special new potion, the most incredible things start to happen. And George's adventure has just begun.

George's Marvellous Medicine is one of Dahl's funniest and most exciting stories.

It follows Birmingham Stage Company's acclaimed productions of Horrible Histories, Why The Whales Came and Danny The Champion of The World – another Roald creation.

Writer Wood said he was delighted to work on the piece, which is his eighth Roald Dahl adaptation.

He said: "It's been on tour before and it's coming back. It's just doing a number of weeks. I'm hoping it will be as successful as before."

"I think it's an interesting one really because it's not one of the big titles, like BFG or James and the Giant Peach."

"One tends to think of them as the big ones but this has a great appeal partly because George is being quite naughty in a way and there is a subversive element, as there is in many Dahl stories."



Scary – George's Marvellous Medicine with Ed Thorpe as George and Deborah Vale as Grandma

"What interested me is the fact that the grandmother, who disappears quite magically by the end of the play, is extraordinary."

She's a grandmother who is particularly annoying and he tries to make her nicer. His medicine is not to kill her off, it's to improve her. But it has strange consequences to do with scale as she grows."

Wood says the audience at New Alexandra Theatre will be almost like a football match as youngsters get into the action.

They will shout and scream their support for the lead character, warning him of any danger.

He loves working with Roald Dahl stories, having first adapted The BFG 25 years ago.

"I have grown to admire very much his storytelling skills over the years. He knew what



A tense moment for George as Grandma loses her temper

It's a cracker of a festive favourite



Jonathan Caguioa as the Nutcracker and Yasuo Atsugi as King Rat in BRB's production Photo: Roy Smiljanic

THE festive season is upon us and that means Birmingham Royal Ballet are returning home to present its annual Christmas treat for the people of the West Midlands, The Nutcracker.

This most Christmassy of all ballets is a much-loved family favourite and will be staged at Birmingham Hippodrome from Friday (November

25) until December 13. This world-famous production by Sir Peter Wright, with exquisite designs by John Macfarlane, is acclaimed as one of the best in the world.

Created 26 years ago as a gift to the city of Birmingham in thanks for the warm welcome given to the company after its move from London, this magical production has grown into a must-see treat and a fixture on the festival calendar.

This season will feature the 500th

performance of the production by Birmingham Royal Ballet.

When young Clara sneaks downstairs on Christmas Eve to play with her new nutcracker doll she is swept up in a fantastic journey filled with toy soldiers, wicked rats, a sugar plum fairy and, of course, her handsome prince.

Featuring the romantic music of Tchaikovsky, The Nutcracker is a spectacular ballet that never fails to cast its wintry spell on audiences.



'Probably my final concert tour'

The only way is Essex...

FORMER 1970s heartthrob David Essex takes to the stage at Wolverhampton Civic Hall next week as part of his first major tour in over four years – and he warns it could also be among his last concert appearances.

The 21-date I'll Be Missing You UK tour includes the show in Wolverhampton on Sunday that will see him perform much-loved hits spanning his entire 50-year career.

He shot to fame when he went to an audition for the London production of the musical Godspell and was chosen for the role of Jesus. He received major awards and some ecstatic reviews which saw him find fame in London's West End.

Since then he has enjoyed a remarkable career that has combined concerts, records, theatre, composing, films and television. He has written, recorded and produced albums that have sold in their millions.

He's had 23 Top 30 singles in Britain alone. These include Rock On, which topped the charts in the UK and the US, selling over one million copies. Subsequent hits followed such as Lamplight, Hold Me Close and Gonna Make You A Star which made the singer a household name and attracted crowds for his concerts that resembled the heyday of Beatlemania.

Acting credits included the movies That'll Be The Day and its sequel Stardust, and more recently BBC TV's EastEnders in which he played the head of the Moon family.

He said: "I'm looking forward to getting back on the road with my band for probably my final concert tour – I'll be missing you."

Three divas in one tribute show

POP fans get three divas rolled into one show at Bilston's Robin 2 venue tomorrow (Friday). The 3 Diva Tribute will feature Elly Jarmain as Cher and Madonna, plus Karin Bello as Tina Turner.

Other highlights at the Mount Pleasant venue include Nick Dagger and his Counterfeit Stones on Saturday.

Liverpool duo China Crisis, who had 80s hits with Christian and Wishful Thinking, perform an acoustic set on Sunday.

There is a seated acoustic show from 70s hitmaker Steve Harley on Monday. He had top ten success with Judy Teen, Mr Soft, Make Me Smile and The Phantom of the Opera.

Punk veterans to celebrate 40 years

PUNK veterans The Damned celebrate 40 years since New Rose at the Wulfrun Hall on Tuesday.

Former Stranglers frontman Hugh Cornwell teams up with the Bard of Salford Dr John Cooper Clarke at Birmingham's O2 Academy on Thursday, December 1. Danger! Electric Six play O2 Academy on Wednesday, following sold out shows by Pierce the Veil and Passenger at the Bristol Street venue. 1990s favourites Teenage Fanclub play the O2 Institute in Digbeth on Saturday, where epic synth outfit White Lies play Tuesday and the dramatic Nothing But Thieves Wednesday.

Shiver me timbers, it's Treasure Island

THIS Christmas Birmingham Repertory Theatre is getting ready to set young hearts racing as they set sail for Treasure Island from Friday (November 25) until January 7.

Last year saw record numbers flocking to The Rep for The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, so expectations are high for another festive spectacular at the city centre theatre.

Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale of adventure has been given a new adaptation by Bryony Lavery, whose A Christmas Carol played to packed houses in 2013. Stage and screen actor Michael Hodgson will play Long John Silver.

THE SHOVEL INN

LYE

Come and join us for our famous Christmas German market at the shovel inn pub on the 1st 2nd and 3rd of December.

Fantastic xmas lights, winter wonderland displays, snow machine, log cabin all decorated with amazing xmas lights and stalls with German style xmas music to create a fabulous Christmas atmosphere.

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10.00 BBC News.
10.20 Regional Programme.
10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, including Arsenal v Bournemouth.
11.50 Sunny D. Dane decides to move out of his parents' house, which means he needs to stay on the right side of his boss, who is determined to seduce him. Katherine Ryan guest stars.
12.15 Citizen Khan. (R) **12.45 Weather for the Week Ahead.** **12.50 BBC News.**

10.00 Black Is the New Black.
10.30 Qi XL. Gyles Brandreth, Victoria Coren Mitchell and Jimmy Carr join series regular Alan Davies and host Sandi Toksvig in an extended edition of the comedy panel show.
11.15 Snooker: UK Championship.
12.05 Snooker: UK Championship Extra.
2.05 Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **3.00 Holly City.** (R) **4.00** This Is BBC Two.

12.40 Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK.
3.50 ITV Nightscreen

12.05 The Last Leg. (R) **1.10** Film: Beyond the Hills. (2012) **3.45** Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix Highlights. **4.40** Kirstie's Vintage Gems. (R) **5.00** George Clarke's Amazing Spaces. (R)

12.20 Film: *Flight of the Phoenix*. (2004)
2.15 SuperCasino

2.00 Fixers on Holiday **1.10** The Inbetweeners
2.10 Crazyhead **3.00** Rude Tube **3.25**
Hollyoaks

Film4

11.00 Sahara (1943) **1.00** Dr Seuss' The
Lorax (2012) **2.45** Carry On Cabby
(1963) **4.35** Epic (2013) **6.40** Mission:
Impossible 2 (2000) **9.00** Men in Black
(1997) **10.50** The Running Man (1987)
12.50 Carlos - Part Two **3.10** Close

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY

A Fairytale Christmas, Channel 5, 3.15pm

A woman spends Christmas organising the sale of a mansion and its contents. The aloof owner initially treats her with disdain but they gradually become attracted to each other. However, the budding relationship is complicated when her old flame comes to visit. Romantic drama, starring C Thomas Howell and Haylie Duff. (2013)

TUESDAY

The Cry of the Owl, BBC1, 11.50pm

Troubled Robert moves to the countryside to get over a divorce. He becomes fascinated by an attractive younger woman and the pair begin an illicit relationship, only for Robert to find himself chief suspect in an investigation when her boyfriend goes missing. Thriller, starring Paddy Considine, Julia Stiles, Karl Pruner and James Gilbert. (2009)



Underworld: Rise of the Lycans, Friday, Channel 4, 12.25am

WEDNESDAY

On Strike for Christmas, Channel 5, 3.15pm

A hard-working mother wants a perfect family Christmas before her two sons go off to college, but is frustrated when they and her husband offer no help with the preparations. She decides to go on strike and do no more housework for the festive season, inspiring her similarly neglected neighbours to follow suit. Drama, starring Daphne Zuniga. (2010)

THURSDAY

Annie Claus Is Coming to Town, Channel 5, 11.30am

Santa Claus's daughter goes to California in search of adventure, and falls in love with the owner of a traditional toy shop, whose old-fashioned business is struggling to make ends meet. However, a scheming elf tries to drive them apart to further his own ambitions of taking over Christmas. Fantasy, starring Maria Thayer and Sam Page. (2011)

FRIDAY

Underworld: Rise of the Lycans, Channel 4, 12.25am

A werewolf leads a revolution against the vampire king who has enslaved his race, starting a centuries-long war. Fantasy horror prequel, starring Michael Sheen, Bill Nighy and Rhona Mitra. (2009)

New series remembers an infamous case

In 1971, Richard Attenborough starred in the film 10 Rillington Place, and admitted he was haunted by the project and the man he played – John Reginald Christie.

It's a name that still has the power to send shivers down the spine of those who are familiar with his crimes.

Christie was born in West Yorkshire, but in the 1940s and 1950s had settled in London; by this time, he had already been convicted of several crimes, including assaulting a prostitute and stealing a priest's car. On his release from prison, he was reconciled with his estranged wife, Ethel, and they moved to Rillington Place, an address that would become infamous.

This new, three-part drama focuses on a period of 10 years, from 1943 to 1953, when Christie murdered at least eight people, including Ethel. It reveals what happened from three points of view – that of Christie, Ethel and of their tragic neighbour, Timothy Evans.

Evans was a Welshman with an IQ of around 70 who moved into an upper flat at the property with his wife Beryl and toddler daughter Geraldine.

When Beryl fell pregnant again and felt they couldn't cope with another baby, Christie offered to carry out a termination – he claimed to be an experienced backstreet abortionist – but instead administered his own form of 'anaesthetic' before strangling her and Geraldine.

Evans was wrongly convicted for their murders, and hanged in Pentonville Prison in 1953; his carriage is one of Britain's most famous miscarriages of justice, and played a major part in the campaign to abolish capital punishment.

Eventually, after moving out of Rillington Place, Christie was caught after a new tenant discovered the bodies of several of his victims stowed in an alcove near the kitchen. He eventually admitted to killing seven women, but denied the murder of Geraldine; his plea of insanity was rejected during his trial.

"This is a story you just can't look away from: an unlikely serial killer who orchestrated a devastating miscarriage of justice," say the drama's writers, Ed Whitmore and Tracey Malone. "It has drawn us in at

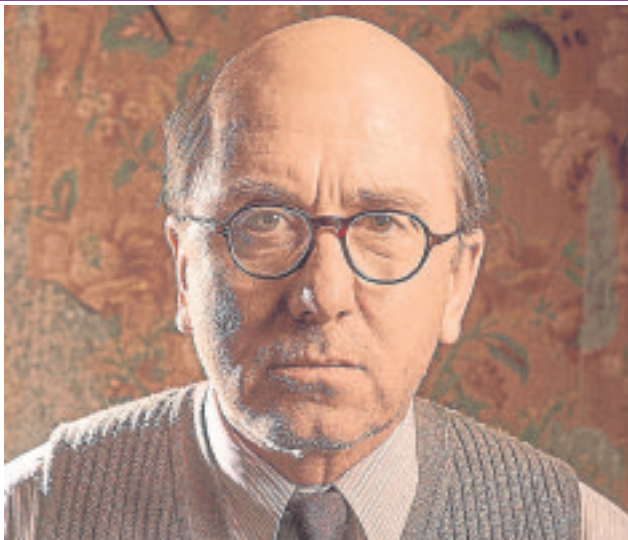
every turn and has attracted an incredibly exciting level of talent who are as committed as we are to bringing it to life."

The house where Christie lived was demolished years ago, so filming has largely taken place in Glasgow, with some location shooting in London.

Samantha Morton plays Ethel, while Nico Mirallegro tackles the role of Evans, who was portrayed memorably by John Hurt in the film version, and Jodie Comer, a hot property following her appearance in BBC3's Thirteen takes the part of Beryl.

"This is an incredible cast," claims executive producer Philippa Giles. "A tribute to the beautiful texture of the scripts."

It's a chilling story, one that is impossible to forget after seeing it depicted on screen. Whether Roth has been disturbed along the same lines as Attenborough was while playing Christie is anybody's guess, but one thing is for sure – it's a tale that will continue to horrify future generations for years to come.



Tim Roth stars in Rillington Place, Tuesday, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

Tour de Celeb

Channel 5, 7pm

Forget I'm a Celebrity, this new series might just be the toughest reality show on British TV. It sees a group of famous faces preparing to take on the toughest stage of the Tour de France and cycle 140 kilometres of rugged mountain terrain. The celebs getting on their bikes are reality TV regulars Hugo Taylor and Lucy Mecklenburgh, presenters Angellica Bell and Jodie Kidd, sports stars Darren Gough, Amy Williams and Austin Healey and choreographer Louie Spence. They already seem like a fairly fit bunch, but they won't be expected to just start pedalling, as this first episode follows them as they begin training under the watchful eyes of the coaches, who include Olympic cyclist Rob Hayles and Britain's most successful Paralympian Sarah Storey.

TUESDAY

The Secret Life of 5 Year Olds

Channel 4, 8pm

For the past two weeks we've followed the progress of a group of four-year-old children, but now attention turns to those who are roughly 12 months older. There's a marked difference between the two classes – the first appeared to be mostly shy and

unsure of themselves, but this time, the 10 children involved are more confident. They're also concerned with asserting their independence and exploring the adult world around them. It quickly becomes clear that charismatic Jude is the dominant personality, and he even begins a fledgling romance with little Ellie – but their bond is put to the test when they are given a crying, lifelike baby doll to take care of. Meanwhile, nurturing Ellie-May takes Daisy, who has cerebral palsy, under her wing, but it's Daisy who turns out to have the greater imagination and may have the ability to influence how the other children play.

WEDNESDAY

Kids on the Edge: Troubled Girls

Channel 4, 10pm

Teenage years have always been troublesome, but it seems that hormonal issues and puberty aren't the only problems facing youngsters these days. According to a recent report, around one in three English teenage girls show symptoms of anxiety or depression, with A&E departments claiming that they are treating more self-harmers in this age group than ever before. The

final episode of Kids on the Edge focuses on two such girls – 17-year-old Demi and Maisie, who is 15. Demi has tried to commit suicide twice, and suffers another crisis during the documentary, but is determined not to end up in a psychiatric unit. Meanwhile, Maisie has been in and

out of various units for three years, and she and her mother are pinning all their hopes on help from the Tavistock clinic's staff.

THURSDAY

Who Do You Think You Are?

BBC1, 8pm

Amanda Holden takes part in the popular genealogy documentary, in which famous faces trace their family trees.

The actress and presenter looks into the rumoured French ancestry on her mother's side of the family, an investigation that leads to an extraordinary Napoleonic-era cross-Channel



Tour de Celeb, Monday, Channel 5, 7pm

romance. But she doesn't stop there. The suicide of her paternal grandfather has always loomed large over her family – and when his story takes her to France once again, she is moved to discover how he helped others through a harrowing tragedy.

FRIDAY

Secrets of Great British Castles

Channel 5, 8pm

Lancaster Castle has witnessed scenes of historical, cultural and political significance throughout the centuries, including incidents of religious persecution, the trials of the Lancashire Witches and 200 public executions. Owned by the Duchy of Lancaster, it was a state prison until 2011 and is still a working crown court. Dan Jones explores its turbulent history and meets Wendy Robinson, a retired prosecutor from Australia, whose ancestors were sentenced to death at Lancaster Crown Court in 1817 for stealing sheep.

Building the World's Most Luxurious Cruise Ship

Channel 5, 9pm

Part one of two. Following engineers and designers as they construct the liner Seven Seas Explorer, aiming to make it the most luxurious ship in the world of its size.

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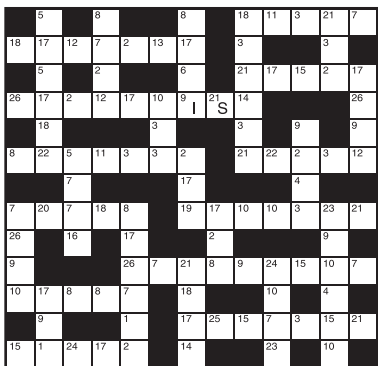
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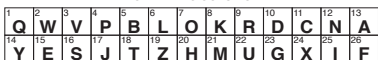
BRAIN GYM No.405

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:



Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

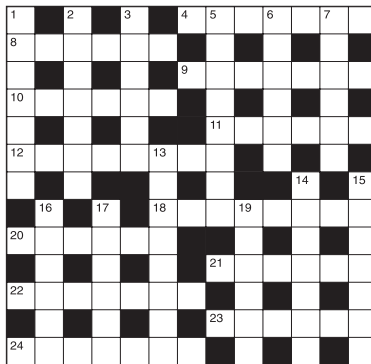
Cryptic Clues:

Across

4. Its message is a grave one (7)
8. Leave the vehicle burning (6)
9. Establishing a link with carpentry (7)
10. Continually changed course, showing diplomacy, we hear (6)
11. They don't do much to earn their reputation (6)
12. Not a back-cloth used by yachtsmen (8)
18. Wireless user gets a new set in a ship (8)
20. Rather sore, perhaps, on entering (6)
21. Seek food for a long time (6)
22. Put some notes in order? (7)
23. Money-making facility (6)
24. They may be of untold value (7)

Down

1. Mother has a stubborn dog (7)
2. Drop from one's hand (7)
3. He sets out the bed-linen (6)
5. Make professional records as sidelines (8)
6. Thrill to some exciting legends (6)
7. A poor state to be in (6)
13. O.K. there's nothing left (3,5)
14. May as well ring off - or ring on (7)
15. Checks the work of police (7)
16. The way people eat (6)
17. Not just lacking in beauty (6)
19. A capital fellow with a hard-working reputation (6)



Quick Clues:

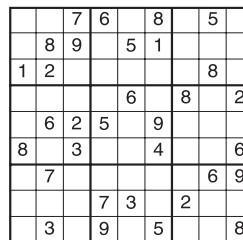
Across

4. Malady (7)
8. Athlete (6)
9. Accomplish (7)
10. Dale (6)
11. Pour from one vessel to another (6)
12. Inert (8)
18. Universal (8)
20. Treasurer (6)
21. Unimpaired (6)
22. Unlawful (7)
23. Calm (6)
24. Cutting (7)

Down

1. Overcome (7)
2. Soiled (7)
3. Discard (6)
5. Episode (8)
6. Show (6)
7. Economy (6)
13. Augment (8)
14. Flashed (7)
15. Strew (7)
16. Ill-humoured (6)
17. Slumbering (6)
19. Desire for food (6)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >



LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Flower stalk; 9 Eye; 10 Downright; 11 Lisle; 13 Refused; 14 Inroad; 16 Estate; 18 Go to pot; 19 Sheaf; 20 Regarding; 21 Tar; 22 Small letter. Down: 2 Lee; 3 Wedge; 4 Reward; 5 Tariffs; 6 Legislate; 7 Bell-ringers; 8 Studies form; 12 Stratagem; 15 Apparel; 17 At will; 19 Sight; 21 Tie. QUICK - Across: 1 Benefaction; 9 Lie; 10 Dismantle; 11 Paper; 13 Tension; 14 Oboist; 16 Triton; 18 Air base; 19 Peril; 20 Immediate; 21 Ass; 22 Recriminate. Down: 2 Ere; 3 Elder; 4 Assets; 5 Trainer; 6 Outfitter; 7 Kleptomania; 8 Meaningless; 12 Programme; 15 Slander; 17 Becalm; 19 Preen; 21 Act.

Quiz

1. Who became potter to George III in 1806?
2. By what name was potassium nitrate formerly known?
3. What was the name of the ferry that sank on the Baltic Sea in 1994?
4. Who was the last Grand Prix world champion to drive a Lotus?
5. Which talent show started Pam Ayres' career?
6. What did Sir Alexander Fleming discover in 1928?
7. To which note does an orchestra tune?
8. What do we call the biennial plant Brassica rapa?
9. Of which constellation is Spica the brightest star?
10. What type of creature is the boomslang?

Last week's solutions:

- Quiz: 1 Joseph Heller; 2 Toronto; 3 Terry Gilliam; 4 Bewitched; 5 Electra complex; 6 Donegal; 7 Jerry Lewis; 8 Malawi; 9 Frederick Delius; 10 Rotary Club.
- Niner: CREMATION

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

- 39124967 gives a deposit,
3287 gives a second deposit,
4533 gives a collection.



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Tuck into this special called murg sara



The Garam Masala, Old Fallow Road, Cannock



Inside the spacious and well-lit dining area

Images by Nakhwal.com



The lamb shank is cooked in a medium sauce

Garam Masala is perfect blend and proves that spice is so nice

IT was perhaps quite fitting that Dua Lipa's hit *Hotter Than Hell* was playing just as I was served my spicy poppadoms.

As it turned out, they were not THAT fiery, but did fit the description. And they whetted the appetite for what was to come.

Crispy, with a touch of garlic and paprika, it was the first time anywhere I had seen them as an option, though owner Maj Miah informs us the traditional variety remain the most popular. Of the accompanying dips, the sweet pickle option, with its ingredients including tamarind, mango chutney and coriander is to die for.

Maj has built up a successful enterprise at the Garam Masala, the former Central pub, in Old Fallow Road. Having cut his teeth at the existing Dilraj, in Wednesfield,

MARK SHIPP tucks in

Maj was looking for bigger premises to expand his empire.

He hasn't looked back as next year marks the 10th anniversary since being opened by Wolves legend Steve Bull. Maj is rightly proud of its success, particularly as competition is strong with a plethora of Indian restaurants just up the road.

"We were looking to offer something different to what was already out there and this was the ideal place for us to do that," said Maj, whose kitchen staff have remained in situ since the restaurant's opening.

The Garam Masala has 126 covers with a function room upstairs, ideal for party bookings, which are popular, or for family dining which it prides itself on. Its choice of up-to-date tunes give it that modern, trendy feel and enables us 40-somethings to stay

in the loop. It has a Five-Star RateMyPlate classification and is clean and fresh inside, while subtle changes are often made to the decor and the menu, but not at the expense of alienating customers. The fact it doubles up by serving Cantonese food is a bonus.

Fusion

Even better for my family and I, it's just a steady stroll away, although customers are said to frequent from Cheslyn Hay, Great Wyrley and even Stafford. The fare is healthy and there are vegetarian options to go with the traditional offerings, chef's specials and fusion dishes.

Among the most popular dishes, Maj informs me, are sylhet balti and the clay pot chicken. There is a clear interaction between staff and customers and the waiters are on hand for advice, particularly in my case as I looked to feast on fish. I was

told my choice of rupchanda pomfret was dry and came on the bone, so a mass platter was suggested instead.

I skipped the prawns, but the meaty salmon and monkfish, cooked in herbs and spices with a hint of garlic, was delicious.

Guest number one opted for the murg makhani, with mushroom pilau – well received – while the younger guest chose his favourite, chicken tikka masala. Desserts followed, and there was a quirky selection, including a Bollywood kulfi, served in a pot which resembles a film reel Oscar statue base and a Turkish Delight-style cheese-cake. We opted though, for a strawberry and vanilla sundae.

Garam Masala is open every day from 5.30pm. Bookings are now being taken for its three-course Christmas Day menu, Indian or English option, at £24.95 for adults and £12.95 for children. Call 01543 502006.

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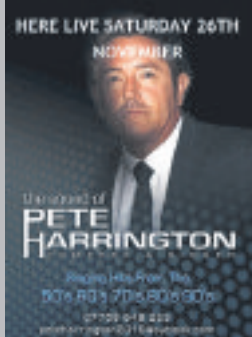
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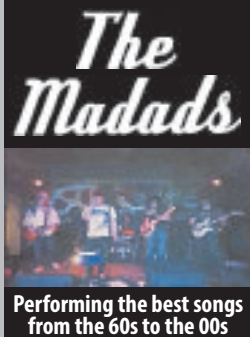
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Commercial feature

Dave and Sharon Owen welcome all old and new customers to The Cross at Oldswinford.

The public house based in Oldswinford is a multi-screen venue showcasing all major live sporting events with Sky Sports and BT Sports.

For those who like 'doing' rather than 'watching', there is the availability of the pool table and dart board.

The pub itself boasts a wide range of real ales, lagers, ciders, wines and spirits – and from Monday to Thursday, from 11am to 5pm, you can buy a pint for £1.99 (Fosters, Strongbow or Bank's Bitter).

Dave and Sharon believe in giving young acts and bands a chance, so they have introduced Open Mic Nights, which take place every Thursday.

You can also find regular entertainment live at The Cross on most weekends with the sound of Pete Harrington coming up on Saturday (November 26) and a five-piece live band, The Madads, on Saturday, December 10, along with disco and karaoke once a month.

Please visit our facebook page at www.facebook.com/TheCrossatOldswinford/ where we will keep you up to date with all our events.

Look at some of our Facebook reviews:

"Dave and Sharon are so friendly and go above and beyond."

"The pub is very clean and such a happy environment."

"Very friendly atmosphere, will go again."



Award-winning landlord Dave Owen, above, and the pub's main bar, below



Danger to babies in car seats but don't stop using them!

Newborn babies could be at risk of suffocation if they spend more than 30 minutes in a car seat, research has suggested.

A recent study conducted by researchers from Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Swindon, the University of Southampton and the University of Bristol found that putting babies in an upright position could lead to breathing difficulties.

A vehicle simulator was used to replicate the effects of placing a newborn baby in a car seat at the 40-degree angle required for travelling.

Of the 40 newborn babies used in the study, researchers observed that a number of them experienced a dangerous drop in their blood oxygen levels, with some falling below 85 per cent saturation. This is far lower than the normal level in the high 90s.

The authors of the study, which was led by Dr Renu Arya, a consultant paediatrician at Great Western Hospital, commented: "A motion simulator was developed to reproduce vertical vibration broadly representative of that at the base of a car safety seat fixed in a rear-facing position in the back seat of a small family car.

"The simulator reproduced the vertical vibrations from travelling at 30mph on a straight urban road, excluding braking, acceleration or going over bumps."



Take car with babies in car seats

It was found that after 30 minutes, the babies' heart and breathing rates had increased, while blood oxygen levels were lower than those associated with lying flat in a cot. This change was observed under conditions where the vehicle was in motion, as well as stationary.

Although the researchers were able to show potential changes in cardiorespiratory stability among the infants when they were placed in this more upright position, it is as yet unknown if this put the infants at serious risk of suffocation.

The researchers commented: "We cannot be certain of the clinical significance or potential risks posed by the changes we have identified."

While further studies are required to properly identify any potential risks associated with transporting newborn babies in car seats, Dr Arya has urged parents to continue to use car seats.

"Parents should not stop using car safety seats to transport their infants. Infants must be protected in moving vehicles, and UK law requires car seats be used whenever infants travel in cars."



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Finance example: 07/07 Honda Civic 1.8 i-VTEC ES 5dr, Cash Price £4495, Deposit £300, Amount of credit £4195, Fixed interest rate 6.25% Flat rate, 11.8% Apr, 60 monthly Payments of £99.60 (£22.98 per week) Total amount payable £6276.00 (Includes Document fee and Completion fee, Subject to status)

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Seeking to send fossil fuels back to the Ice Age

Boldly going forward (ish)

By Paul Naylor

My first experience behind the wheel of a revolutionary electric vehicle happened more than two years ago. I took delivery of a Nissan Leaf and at the time I wrote how much I enjoyed the concept. The lack of noise was noticeable, amusing my children as we traversed the highways, windows down to fully appreciate it quietness.

Then there was the novelty of no fuel. Plugging the car in every couple of days to charge the petrol-free beast was more akin to mobile phone ownership than motoring. Much like its portable telecommunication cousins, focus on battery-life life becomes – excuse the pun – all-consuming.

In my original review I praised the ideals of Nissan for even contemplating an all-electric vehicle. Indeed, the Leaf is not the first purely electric car, but certainly recognised as the pivotal family-run about aimed at greener-minded drivers, seeking to send fossil fuels back to the Ice Age.

Fast forward 24+ months and a shiny, updated version of the Leaf arrived at the office. Unlike the majority of review vehicles – if not all other – the Leaf arrived on the back of a flat-bed truck, hinting at its limitations regarding 'driving range'.

This incarnation – the Tekna 30kWh – looks very similar to its forerunner, with the most notable addition being the LED lighting. Billed as bronze in colour, most folk would label it as metallic brown, but hey, colour choice is always a personal thing. Let's not dwell on that preference.

So, what is it like to drive? Well, for the first 30 minutes it wasn't. Not Nissan's fault, more mine really.

Unlike the previous model I had tested, this Leaf came with an additional – and extremely well-concealed – safety measure.

Confused

I sat at the 'helm' of the car, glowing dashboard displaying an estimated range of 128 miles. Great.

I put the Leaf's automatic gear shift into drive and depressed the accelerator and ... nothing.

The flap that acts as a hand-break was definitely off. Check. Quiet engine on. Check.

It felt like it wanted to go. And yet ...

Thirty minutes later, and feeling somewhat confused/flustered I sheepishly crept from the driving seat back in to the office.

I googled "getting the Nissan Leaf to go" and "my Leaf won't move" feverishly. Help me. HELP ME.

Five minutes later I found the solution.

For those of you who have seen JJ Abrams' rebooted Star Trek from a few years back, the initial launch of the Enterprise is thwarted when Sulu hasn't taken off an additional parking break.

It transpires that a foot break, hidden flush to the floor, needs to be depressed before 'take off'.

I was relieved to finally be on the road again. The shenanigans had made a dent in my projected driving range, but the experience of gliding around in the Leaf was as I had remembered. Quiet and comfortable, it is a joy to drive. The gearbox is excellent. So responsive and acceleration is a dream.

I remain a fan of the Nissan Leaf. The concept is strong and while the driving range has increased a tad, for many motorists the charging of a vehicle and the time it takes is still an inconvenience in such a busy world.

Nissan is getting there, but unless you – the driver – are all about pottering about, it will be a few years yet before such vehicles become truly practical.

AT A GLANCE

Nissan Leaf Tekna 30kWh

Price £27,230 (OTR price includes Government incentive – plug-in grant of 35% up to a maximum of £4,500 and £55 Government First Registration Fee.

Engine code EM57

Electric Motor type AC synchronous

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Max torque 1 (Nm/min-1) 254/0-3008rpm

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Rise in accidents partly due to change in lifestyle needs

Vans and other delivery vehicles have been involved in 700 fatal accidents over the past seven years, according to figures released by the Department for Transport.

During that time, there have been nearly 70,000 casualties involving vans, 700 of which were fatal.

Digital mapping firm MapMechanics analysed the Department for Transport figures, which detailed accidents on British roads that were reported to the police between 2009 and 2015, discovering that the largest spikes had occurred in London and the south-east of England – where accidents rose by 20 per cent.

David Cockrell, director at MapMechanics, said: "The make-up of Britain's roads appears to be changing, with the volume of vans, mopeds and private taxi cabs increasing to meet demand from the 'now generation' who are using the internet to order goods, takeaways and taxis. Little wonder accidents have increased involving these groups of vehicles."

Motorcycles and mopeds with engines of 125cc or less that were being used exclusively for work purposes were also involved in more accidents during the same time period.

Nationwide, the number of accidents involving these vehicles



Vans and other delivery vehicles have been involved in 700 fatal accidents

has risen by 31 per cent since 2009, reaching 1,174 cases in 2015.

Wales witnessed the greatest increase in accidents, seeing a staggering 108 per cent rise. London was second with a 56 per cent spike, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber on 30 per cent.

Private minicabs were also involved

in 1,090 road accidents in 2015, representing a 34 per cent rise since 2009.

Areas that saw the greatest increases in minicab accidents were London with a 76 per cent rise, Wales with a 75 per cent rise, and the north-east of England, which experienced an increase of 72 per cent.

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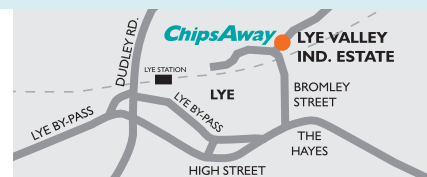
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*If you own any vehicle that is 4 years or older you can receive up to £4,250 (Inc. VAT) customer saving off the RRP of any New Ford Car (excl. KA+, Fiesta Studio & Style, Focus Style, ST & RS, Mustang, Tourneo Connect, Ranger XL, XLT and Wildtrak) contracted between 25th November and 28th November 2016 and registered between 25th November and 31st December 2016. Customer saving from £1,150 to £4,250 available dependent on model line, please check with your nearest participating Ford dealer for details. Offer not available in conjunction with any other marketing programme. Available to retail, Privilege and Ambassador customers only. Model shown above, Focus ST-Line, receives £3,750 (Inc. VAT) customer saving off the RRP at participating dealers.

New connectivity offering launched with the Kodiahq



Connectivity in the cabin of the new large SUV



Kodiahq drivers are fully connected

Alongside the launch of the Škoda Kodiahq, the brand is also presenting its new connectivity offering – mobile online services – under the label Škoda Connect.

These are divided into two categories. The Infotainment Online services provide information and aid navigation, while the Care Connect services provide assistance as well as remote access to the car. "From now on, Škoda Kodiahq drivers are fully connected – to their car and, if desired, to the world of Škoda," explained Werner Eichhorn, Škoda Board member for sales and marketing. "With Škoda Connect we are making a digital world accessible to our customers that will make their driving experience even more comfortable and safe."

The Infotainment Online services are available in every Kodiahq that is equipped with the Amundsen or Columbus navigation systems. One standout feature here is the online traffic information: this displays the current traffic flow on the selected route and suggests sensible alternative routes in the event of a traffic jam. With Google Earth™ and Google StreetView™, navigation using the Columbus navigation system becomes a visual experience. Additionally, the services provide information for drivers of the new SUV in fuel prices, parking information, news and weather.

Besides the Infotainment Online services, the Care Connect services, which can be divided into Proactive Services and Remote Vehicle Access, will also be available from now on. These come as standard on every Škoda Kodiahq in the UK – irrespective of the choice of infotainment system. The data is exchanged via the car's own integrated SIM card.

Important

The Emergency Call function is particularly important here. This is automatically activated after an accident in which a restraint system, such as an airbag, has been deployed. The vehicle establishes a voice and data connection to a dedicated emergency call centre and transfers all of the necessary information. An employee at the emergency call centre initiates the most appropriate support measures and, where necessary, sends an emergency vehicle to the site of the accident. The driver or passengers can also trigger the Emergency Call manually via a button in the roof module. Service Scheduling is also included in the Proactive Services. Here the owner is contacted by the retailer before the vehicle's service is due in order to arrange a convenient and timely appointment.

The Škoda Care Connect services also include the services for Remote Vehicle Access, which can be accessed via the Škoda Connect app, i.e. via the user's smartphone. Here the Vehicle Status service remotely informs the user about the status of the lights and fuel tank of the Škoda Kodiahq as well as whether the doors are open or closed. The Parking position function shows where the vehicle is parked. The Honk & Flash function makes it easier to find the car by activating the horn and indicator, as the name suggests.

The Škoda Connect app is complemented by the Škoda Connect portal, which brings the Connect services to the customer's home computer. The portal can be used to configure services as well as transfer destinations and routes to the car. The Škoda dealer will help with registration and activation in the portal.

The Care Connect services from Škoda Connect can be accessed free of charge for the first year following the purchase of a new Škoda Kodiahq. Subsequently the services of Remote Vehicle Access are subject to a charge, while all other Care Connect services can be used free of charge for a further 13 years.

The offer for the Infotainment Online portfolio has a similar arrangement. Use is free of charge for the first year and the customer can extend this for a fee. With the Amundsen navigation system, the services operate through the user's connected mobile phone or via a data dongle that is available as an optional extra. With the Columbus system, the mobile phone's hotspot can also be used or a SIM card can be integrated.

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THREE SEATER sofa, red, clad, nearly new. £300. Single double bed, £50 for both. Must call. 0121 429 2859 / 07866 969325.

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TWO SEATER leather electric recliner settee, off white, excellent condition, cost £2,100, sell £500. 07828 325258.

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Bull in familiar pose – he scored 306 goals in old gold and black



How The Express & Star reported the signings – and the end of Bull's career



Bully went on to win 13 England caps and played at Italia 90



Steve Bull and Andy Thompson on joining Wolves 30 years ago

No Bull – signing broke the Black Country divide

THE Black Country divide was crossed in a bright orange Ford Cortina the day Steve Bull's legend was born at Wolves 30 years ago.

A Thursday that began at West Bromwich Albion and finished at Molineux occurred on 20 November 1986.

Andy Thompson also made the trip to talk to Wolves about a £70,000 double deal.

Both were contenders for the first-team at Albion, who had just been relegated to Division Two.

Wolves, however, were beginning the first of their two seasons in the bottom tier. Graham Turner's arrival as boss had steadied the ship, while Baggies counterpart Ron Saunders was busy clearing out much of the squad at the Hawthorns.

'Bully' had been plucked from West Midlands League outfit Tipton Town in 1984, whose manager Sid Day also worked as a scout for Albion.

Waited

He had made his first-team debut under Nobby Stiles on 23 October 1985, replacing Garth Crooks as a substitute in a 2-1 Full Members Cup win against Crystal Palace. He waited a further five months for his league debut, a 1-0 defeat at Queens Park Rangers on 12 April 1986. His full bow came at home to Sheffield Wednesday 10 days later.

That would turn out to be his only football in the top-flight, with three more Second Division appearances and two League Cup appearances the next season before he was sold.

Bull used his first wife Sarah's old car to drive himself and Thommo to put pen to paper at Molineux. Over the next 13 years Bully surpassed John Richards' goalscoring record with 306 in 561 games.

The former John Ireland at the ground has been re-

SPORTING MEMORIES

By Craig Birch

"We were just Black Country lads who wanted to play first-team football and he guaranteed us that."

named after him and he's an honorary club president. He was made an MBE in 2000 and won 13 England caps, going to the 1990 World Cup.

He debuted at home to Wrexham two days after joining, a 3-0 defeat, and played in the FA Cup humbling against Chorley before a lifeless loss at Lincoln.

He said: "I was 21, at the time, and very immature. I didn't really know that much about football and I'd only been a professional for about 18 months.

"Sid Day was a scout for Johnny Giles and Nobby Stiles and my manager at Tipton Town. He got me the chance with Albion. I was doing 13 hours a day in a factory and then training Tuesday and Thursday night with the youth-team at Albion. I left my job to go and play football.

"I only did that when I got my deal and I knew I had to make the most of it. I rolled my socks up and hard work, sometimes, pays off. When they decided to sell me, I'd just scored three goals in five games but there was also Garth Crooks, Imre Varadi and George Reilly up front. I just don't know why I didn't fit into Ron Saunders' plans."

He added: "Molineux was not the best then, sometimes when I'm there now I just stop to look at the

place and think 'what a transformation.' We came through reception and to the manager's office, where Graham (Turner) came out and wanted to see us separately. I went in, then Thommo.

"He told me that day what the club would be like in 30 years time and he was absolutely bang on.

"We were just Black Country lads who wanted to play first-team football and he guaranteed us that. It was a run-down club offering a like-for-like deal, but Albion didn't want to give us a chance and Wolves opened doors for us."

Thompson will always be associated due to his part in the transfer that took them both away from Albion. He was valued at £20,000 with Bull costing £50,000 at a time when Wolves had escaped financial ruin just a few months earlier.

Scouted

Featherstone-born Thompson netted 45 goals in 451 games over 11 years. It was a wrench for him to leave Albion, initially, having come through the youth ranks and he didn't think he was given the send-off he deserved.

Thommo said: "I was 13 when I went to West Brom. I got scouted playing for a kids' team in Bloxwich.

"I was in the team at the time that I left. That was the thing that I couldn't understand. It turned out to be the wrong decision for the club.

"We'd come from West Brom, which was a nice ground at the time, but there was just something about Wolves. Graham sold the club to me.

"He was building a young team and he thought he could do great things."

Bull and Thompson were not the last to leave Albion for Wolves that season, with winger Robbie Denison jumping ship for £20,000 on transfer deadline day in March 1987. Now 53 and living in Halesowen, he spent 10 years at the club, playing 353 times, scoring 49 goals.



The former John Ireland Stand at Molineux, now named after Steve Bull



Bull and Thompson reunited at a Wolverhampton pub last month



Steve Bull is presented with his MBE by Her Majesty the Queen



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Luke who's at double for Glassboys

Stourbridge 3 Buxton 2

TOP scorer and FA Cup hero Luke Benbow scored two outstanding goals as Stourbridge beat Buxton 3-2 on Saturday.

Benbow scored a brilliant free-kick from just outside the box against Whitehawk in the week and did the same again to give the Glassboys the lead after 13 minutes.

There was a 20 minute break shortly after when referee Matthew Law pulled up with what turned out to be a ligament tear and a replacement official to run the line had to be found.

Stourbridge continued to make the running after the delay and Chris Lait played a great pass on the stroke of half time to put Jordan Archer through but his shot was saved by former Wolves goalkeeper Jan Budtz.

When Benbow's second came on 49 minutes it was a contender for goal of the season as he lobbed Budtz from 30 yards, the ball just falling under the bar and into the net. Buxton were offering little in attack at this stage, though Bradley Grayson did see a shot acrobatically saved by Matt Gould on 62 minutes.

But Stourbridge substitute Jake Heath set Kayleden Brown up for the third goal with his first touch on 72 minutes.

Bradley Grayson reduced the deficit on 83 minutes as he put the ball past Gould from the edge of the area after being set up by Nicky Walker and then got a second on 90 when a low corner found him on the edge of the six-yard box.

And Buxton very nearly snatched an unlikely point when captain Greg Young headed a free kick into the box against the bar and it was then headed just over.

The Glassboys' home clash with Ilkeston on Monday night was postponed.

Plenty of chances for club runners to pull on vests

THERE were plenty of chances for Dudley Kingswinford runners to pull on their vests at the weekend.

In the Midlands 7 cross country race in Nottingham over a seven-mile course, Stuart Perkins was first back for DK, finishing in 46th place in 45.22.

Dave Norman chased him round to claim 52nd place in 46.11, Simon Blizard came home in 47.46 in 63rd, a place ahead of Mark Homer who finished in 47.59, Steve Parr took 106th place in 53.26 and Andrew Weaver finished in 53.34 to take 108th place and complete the A team scorers. Richard Jones came home in 54.39 in 115th.

Twenty four hours later John Andrews took part in the 5.6 mile Beckbury Trail race and finished in 52.05.

Pete and Sarah Krivosic and Jan Burbie travelled the short distance to Wyre Forest to take part in the Dirt Run 10k, a muddy run on fire tracks and woodland paths from the visitors centre at Callow Hill. At a frosty Sutton Park Liz Hettle, Alison and Keith Whitehouse and Gina Collins kept each other company in the Mo Run 10k.

Harvey belts up for martial arts success



Harvey Hawkes

WITH more than 10 years of experience and a growing list of accolades to his name, Harvey Hawkes is a karate prodigy – and he's still only 13.

A second dan black belt in the martial art, the Brierley Hill youngster trains up to five times a week at Dudley Shukokai Karate Club.

Hawkes as had an exceptional year and came away from the recent Carlow International Karate Championships with five medals.

His mother, Julie Brown said: "He has been involved with karate since he was

three so he's been doing it for a while. He has done exceptionally well – a world champion and a second dan black belt.

"He got four golds and a silver at the Carlow championships and he has managed to get 24 gold, 12 silver and 11 bronze medals from various competitions this year.

"For his age, he was probably one of the youngest black belts in the area and he trains four to five times every week – he really works hard."

Since his success at the competition, Hawkes has been knuckling down at

Dudley Shukokai, located at Thorns Community College in Brierley Hill.

He attended the Welsh League karate competition at the end of October and came away with bronze, silver and gold medals and is set to travel to Malta and Romania to compete next year.

His little sister Darcey, aged five, is keen on karate too and scooped a silver medal at the Carlow International Karate Championships.

"She started when she was three and she is five now," said Julie. "She has done really well with it so far."

BONUS POINT OUT OF REACH

Stourbridge 19 Preston Grasshoppers 10
STOUR appeared to have this game in the bag at half-time, but a disappointing second half allowed the struggling visitors back into the game and denied them a bonus point.

Results elsewhere worked in their favour though and they move up to fourth in National 2 North.

Stour recovered the kick-off and started to work through the phases, securing lineout throw in the Preston midfield. A planned first phase move saw Nigel Mukarati feed Liam Munro who burst through a gap in the visitors' line. He was chased down short of the tryline but the ball was worked quickly left where Chris Scott and Mukarati combined to work Chris Easton over in the corner.

Captain Ciaran Moore barged off some ineffective tackling to increase the score and Scott converted.

The game became stop-start with frequent blasts of referee Ben Russell's whistle, but Preston were unable to breach Stour's defences and Moore scored a short-range try.

Confidence

But Stour failed to add to their score in the second half. When a promising Stour attack stalled early due to a holding-on offence, Preston launched an attack of their own and Cameron Robinson, son of Jason, raced over to score. Growing in confidence the visitors upped the workrate and Rob Bramhall scored an opportunistic try.

As the clock ran down Stour secured two penalties which were kicked to the corner in pursuit of a bonus point but the Preston defences held them out.

This Saturday Stour travel to Otley, 3pm ko. The Lions maintained their top status with another bonus point win at home to Veyseyans by 48-12, scoring seven tries, through George Tildesley (3), Will Hollis, Max Fellows, Will King and Ben Tringham, who converted five and added a penalty.

Early pacesetters in Midlands 2, Lions face a crunch game this weekend as they travel to Shirley to take on Camp Hill.



Captain, and double try scorer, No 8 Ciaran Moore attempts to find a way through

Yozza misses out after epic comeback

ANOTHER fantastic comeback from Tipton's Jamie Hughes went awry on missed doubles at the last as he went out of the Grand Slam of Darts at the second round stage.

Hughes had Wolverhampton Civic Hall rocking as he came from 9-5 down to level the scores before a last leg shootout. He missed five match darts, in-

cluding a no score visit during a last-gasp attempt at 24, allowing Chris Dobey back in to settle matters with his first attempt at the same number.

The Black Country thrower played his part in a thriller at the Civic with four 180s and two 177s, the latter against the darts on the way. Dobey hit five maximums. Hughes had the

throw for the 19th and final leg, a 140 leaving him 24 with Dobey not on a finish. He ended up bust.

His second visit saw him miss the board completely with all three goes at double 12, with Dobey pouncing on 24 with his first attempt.

Michael van Gerwen won the Grand Slam for the second time.

Zaber's title bid ended by cut eye

A NASTY cut curtailed Manny Zaber's hopes of claiming his first pro title as Josh Baillie went away with the British Challenge super featherweight belt.

Zaber, from Old Hill, was retired at the end of the fifth after a massive gash opened up above his left eye ending what was supposed to be an eight-rounder.

The battle headlined Errol Johnson's Black Country Boxing show titled 'Going For Gold' at Walsall Town Hall on Saturday night.

Former Midlands, English and British lightweight champion Martin Gethin outpointed Liam Richards in a hometown bout – and is immediately back in action this weekend.

'The Quiet Man' had his hand raised for the 27th time in his 36th pro bout. The 32-year-old had hinted at retirement, but fights again on Saturday at Wembley Arena against John Wayne Hibbert for a title, which may be for the WBC International super lightweight belt.

Hot prospect Zach Parker settled for a points win, 60-54, over Adam Jones.

West Bromwich's Thomas Loach was the star of the other three four-rounders, scoring a third round stoppage at welterweight over debutant Jerral Spencer.

Wolverhampton's Joshua Burke was beaten by his gumshield as he was docked two points for losing his equipment. Six times the gumshield came out during a cruiserweight bout against Russ Henshaw, costing him a draw. Burke lost 39-37 on the cards.

Chasetown's Luke Jones' bout with Northern Irishman Alec Bazza at lightweight, was over at the end of the first round. The two butted heads accidentally, leaving both with a cut above the left eye. Bazza's injury was ruled too severe to continue and a victor could not be decided.

Rutter rounds off season on podium

MICHAEL RUTTER signed off for the season with another superb podium at the Macau GP.

The Brierley Hill-born rider led for much of the race but was beaten on the final lap by team-mate Peter Hickman.

Rutter, aged 44, riding for Bathams/SMT Racing, started the 12-lap race second on the grid and enjoyed a battle royale with Hickman, Martin Jessop and newcomer Glenn Irwin. The record-breaking eight-time winner eventually brought his BMW home in second place, securing a stunning 17th podium in 22 races around the Chinese street circuit.

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